THE SAINTS

SAINT MARGARET MARY

"THE SAINTS" SERIES

EDITED BY M. HENRI JOLY

Scarlet Art Vellum, Gilt lettered, gold top

The Psychology of the Saints. By HENRI JOLY.

St. Augustine. By Prof. AD HATZFELD.

St. Vincent de Paul. By Prince EMMANUEL DE BROGLIE.

St. Clotilda. By Prof. G. KURTH.

St. Ignatius of Loyola. By HENRY JOLY.

St. Louis. By MARIUS SEPET.

St. Ambrose. By the DUC DE BROGLIE.

St. Francis of Sales. By A. D. MARGERIE.

St. Jerome. By the Rev. Father LARGENT.

St. Nicholas I. By JULES ROY.

Blessed Joan of Arc. By L. PETIT DE JULLEVILLE.

St. Dominic. By JEAN GUIRAUD.

St. John Chrysostom. By AMIÉ PUECH.

St. Antony of Padua. By the ABBÉ ALBERT. LEPITRE.

St. Cajetan. By R. DE MAULDE LA CLAVIÈRE.

St. Teresa. By HENRI JOLY.

St. Peter Fourier. By L. PINGAUD.

St. Mary the Virgin. By RENÉ MARIE DE LA BROISE.

St. John Vianney: Curé d'Ars. By JOSEPH VIANNEY.

St. Thomas à Becket. By MGR. DEMIMUID.

St. Patrick. By ABBÉ RIGUET.

St. Margaret Mary. By MGR. DEMIMUID.

Blessed Thomas More. By HENRI BREMOND.

SAINT MARGARET MARY

(1647-1690)

BY

MONSIGNOR DEMIMUID

PROTONOTARY APOSTOLIC, DOCTOR OF LITERATURE

TRANSLATED BY

A. M. BUCHANAN, M.A.

ALMA COLLEGE
270.05
LIBRARY
M 337
Alma, California

LONDON

BURNS OATES & WASHBOURNE LTD.

PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

1927

5587

Nihil Obstat.

H. SEBASTIANUS BOWDEN

CENSOR DEPUTATUS.

Imprimatur.

EDM. CAN. SURMONT,

VICARIUS GENERALIS,

WESTMONASTERII,

Die 26 *Junii*, 1913.

Made and Printed in Great Britain

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

EDUCATION - - - - - - 1

CHAPTER II

VOCATION - - - - - - 30

CHAPTER III

NOVICIATE - - - - - - 66

CHAPTER IV

PROFESSION - - - - - - 94

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT REVELATIONS - - - 115

CHAPTER VI

TRIALS AND OPPOSITION - - - - 154

CHAPTER VII

TRIUMPH - - - - - - 201

NOTE

A HUNDRED and thirty years after Margaret Mary's death, she was declared Venerable by Pope Leo XII. in March, 1824, after a thorough and searching examination of her teaching and actions. In July, 1830, her tomb was canonically opened, and two instantaneous cures took place on this occasion. The second stage of her process was reached on September 18, 1864, when she was pronounced Blessed by a decree of Pope Pius IX. Not until more than fifty years later was the long cause consummated, but at last, on May 13, 1920, she was canonized by Pope Benedict XV. Her feast is kept on October 17, the day of her death.

SAINT MARGARET MARY

CHAPTER I

EDUCATION

ON July 22, 1647, in a little village in the district of Charolais, belonging to the Diocese of Autun, was born a child whose fame was destined to spread far beyond the limits of her native province and country, until her name has become familiar to the Catholics of both hemispheres, as being inseparably connected with a devotion that has been rightly termed the great devotion of the age in which we live.

The father of this highly favoured child was named Claude Alacoque; her mother was Philiberte Lamyn.

The impious, mocking spirit of the eighteenth century made the name of Alacoque an object of ridicule, and the Jansenist publications of the period, the writers of farces, and even Voltaire himself, who might have put his mighty intellect to a better use, vied with one another in jeering at a name which was far from suggesting anything laughable to St. Margaret Mary's contemporaries, but rather evoked feelings of respect for a family

held in high esteem in the region to which it had for a long time belonged.

There are documents extant, dating from the fifteenth century, which show that the Alacoques were even then honourable landowners in Charolais. By the seventeenth century they had spread pretty well all over the district, and we find mention of them in ten different places; but whatever their position in life, whether they were priests, lawyers, tradespeople, artisans, or labourers, they seem always to have had a reputation for energy, intelligence, honesty and piety.

They were not nobles,[1] nor were they exactly wealthy, but as a rule they were able to live comfortably, and to give alms generously. They belonged to the middle class, which by dint of hard work and perseverance, as well as by its sterling worth, had gradually risen in the esteem of all, and whilst the poorer folk looked up to them as superiors, the nobility gave them so many marks of confidence, and even of friendship, as to break down the barrier that then existed between families of different ranks.

We know less of the Lamyn family, but what has been said of the Alacoques will probably apply also to them. Claude Alacoque's father-in-law was royal notary of Saint-Pierre le Vieux, near Mâcon, and he seems therefore to have been of the same

[1] They possessed armorial bearings, and in 1703 St. Margaret Mary's brother, Chrysostom, established his right to bear them. According to the *Armorial de Bourgogne*, "Ils portaient d'or à un coq de gueules en chef et un lion de même en pointe."

social standing as his son-in-law. The fact that the two families were connected by marriage justifies a supposition that there may have been previous intermarriages, and that both were held in equal honour.

At the time of his marriage with Philiberte Lamyn, Claude Alacoque was already royal notary, although he was scarcely twenty-five years of age. He was subsequently appointed to be magistrate of the lordships of Terreau, Corcheval, and Pressy.

He lived at Lautecour,[1] a village or hamlet belonging to the commune of Verosvres. Part of his house is still standing, and visitors can see a room where St. Margaret Mary is said to have been born. It is now converted into a chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart, but the beams of the ceiling are still covered with mythological and allegorical paintings in the Renaissance style, whilst the armorial bearings of the family appear upon a modillion, supported by two cupids.

Margaret Alacoque was the fifth child of a family of seven, and was born, as has been said, on July 22, 1647. She was baptized on the twenty-fifth of the

[1] His residence was actually at Janots, the eastern quarter of Lautecour. In the following century Lautecour lost much of its importance, and, its population having diminished, many houses were pulled down in the centre of the village, so that at the present time the place consists of two groups of houses; that on the west retains the name of Lautecour, whilst the easterly portion of the village is known as Janots. In the seventeenth century, however, Janots formed part of Lautecour, and in official documents the whole village is so called.

same month, her baptismal name being simply Margaret; she took the additional name of Mary at her confirmation in 1669. Her godfather was Antony Alacoque, parish priest of Verosvres, whom Hamon has shown (*Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 54, n. 2) to have been her father's first cousin, and not her uncle, as was formerly supposed.

Her godmother was Marguerite de Saint-Amour, daughter of Jacques de Saint-Amour, lord of the manors of Foncrenne and Villiers, and wife of Claude de Fautrières, lord of the manor of Corcheval. By consenting to stand in such a relation to the new-born baby, this lady gave unmistakable proof of the esteem and affection with which the local nobility regarded the Alacoque family.

The notary and his wife no doubt felt joy and legitimate pride at the birth of their child, but they certainly had no idea of the value of the gift bestowed by God, not only upon them, but upon France and the whole Church. No one could foresee the mission destined to be accomplished by this infant born of a family which, though most respectable, was quite unknown beyond the limits of its own country.

At that time public attention in France and throughout Europe was turned to very different objects. The years had scarcely passed which are reckoned as the most glorious in the whole history of France.[1] Descartes had recently written his

[1] Victor Cousin, *La Jeunesse de Mme. de Longueville*, ch. viii.

Discours de la Méthode, and Corneille had produced all his masterpieces, whilst almost each year was marked by one of Condé's victories.[1]

Yet this period was only a prelude to the reign of Louis XIV., one of the three or four grandest reigns in the course of history. It is true that before it began France was destined to experience the miseries and follies of the Fronde; but this rebellion, which began in 1647, when St. Margaret Mary was born, and broke out in all its fury in the following year, caused the thoughts of all to be centred on political matters. Society was absorbed by the events of the moment, and had no eyes or ears for anything but the drama, alternately tragic and comic, that was then being enacted, and, if anyone had proclaimed the fact that God had just bestowed upon France a pledge of His predilection, by allowing the birth in that country of one who would introduce a new devotion, calculated to revive faith and piety in an age of indifference and unbelief, no attention would have been paid to the announcement, or it would have been received with a smile of disdainful incredulity.

God does not, however, judge men and things by the same standard as the world, and amidst the din of battles, the excitement of party spirit, and the amusements for which the time of Anne of Austria's regency was famous, there can be no doubt tha He was watching over the family of the royal notary at Lautecour, and taking particular delight

[1] Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, ch. iii.

in the child just born there. God foresaw all the splendour of her future sanctity, and was already calling her to exercise one of the great apostolates in His Church, and it was not long before He gave manifest proof of His love for her. Even before she reached the age of reason, whilst her mental powers were only beginning to develop, she received extraordinary favours and graces. At the very outset of her life we find traces of the miraculous and supernatural—in fact, it must be admitted that this circumstance constitutes one of the chief difficulties in dealing with the subject.

In the fifth century of our era, Theodoret, when about to write the history of St. Simeon Stylites, paused, wondering whether he should undertake the task, since he feared to be charged with falsehood or foolish credulity by men accustomed to criticize whatever was told them by the aid of their natural faculties, and to reject as untrue anything beyond the scope of these faculties.[1]

If such was the case in a century when, as Bossuet said, "there were Christians in the world," what must we think of the present day, when even those, who regard themselves as loyal to the faith of their childhood, have ceased to care about the supernatural, consider it as little as possible, and are always ready to ascribe to dreams and fancies the ravishing ecstasies and holy delights of Divine love?

[1] Theodoret, *Eccles. Hist.*, ch. xxvi, quoted by Languet in his *Vie de la Vénérable sœur Marguerite Marie.*

Ought we to give up any attempt to make known one of the most beautiful souls that ever developed under the direct action of God's grace, and a devotion with which the future of the world seems inseparably connected, and which is capable of drawing down upon nations and individuals the richest gifts of His heavenly bounty? To abandon our design would be to convict ourselves of cowardice and want of faith; it would show that we really shrink from the miraculous, although it may be attested by the authority and sincerity of irrefutable evidence. Hence we have come to the conclusion that, in spite of all objections, it is right to attempt the task, without giving way to fear, and without casting a veil over the extraordinary and miraculous elements in St. Margaret Mary's life, which cannot be written at all unless the supernatural facts are recorded, that are interwoven with it from beginning to end.

Margaret was only three or four years old when she displayed the first wonderful effects of God's grace working in her soul, foreshadowing the incomparable favours that He intended to bestow upon her at a later date. She felt a great horror of sin to a degree very unusual in so young a child. Thirty years afterwards, in recalling her earliest memories, she exclaimed: "O my only Love, how much do I owe Thee for having watched over me from my infancy and for having made Thyself Master and Owner of my heart! . . . No sooner had I begun to know myself, than Thou didst reveal to me the hideous nature of sin, filling my

heart with such a dread of it, that the least taint of it caused me unbearable suffering."[1]

A child of three or four can have only a very vague idea of the nature of sin, and Margaret would certainly have been unable to explain precisely how and under what circumstances guilt was incurred, but nevertheless she felt an extreme distaste for everything that could possibly be sinful, and was much afraid of doing wrong inadvertently. Thus, in order to check her vivacity and her excessive delight in noise and movement, it was enough to tell her that she was in danger of offending God, and she was quiet at once, all her high spirits subsiding as if by magic.

What is even more surprising is that, about this time, she made a vow of chastity. "I understood," she wrote later, "the meaning neither of a vow nor of chastity." But some hidden instinct told her that this virtue contained a merit and beauty beyond her comprehension, and she felt irresistibly impelled to pledge herself solemnly to practise it faithfully throughout her life. She renewed this vow and others on several occasions, and with peculiar care and solemnity, between the two elevations at Holy Mass, saying: "My God, I consecrate my purity to Thee; my God, I make a vow to Thee of perpetual chastity." This took

[1] This passage occurs in the *Mémoire* that she wrote in 1685 in compliance with an order given by her director, Père Rolin. It was first published in the second volume of the *Vie et Œuvres de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, compiled by the Visitation nuns of Paray in 1867. The references in the present work are to the second edition, published in 1874.

place probably in the chapel of the Château at Corcheval, where, as we shall see, she spent part of her childhood with her godmother.

It may be said that these things are not necessarily of a supernatural character, but were the outcome of the atmosphere of faith, virtue, and piety that had surrounded Margaret from her cradle. No doubt, in truly Christian households, where the parents take care that the children see and hear nothing but what is true, modest, just, holy, lovely, and of good fame, the minds even of infants receive insensibly, from all around them, impressions which may be the seed of future virtues destined to develop later. In the case of Margaret Alacoque, however, acts and habits of virtue sprang up at once in vigorous growth, and, as we have just seen, she never hesitated to ascribe what she felt within herself to Him whom she called her "only Love," for she realized in the depths of her soul the action of her Divine Master and the influence of His grace. Yet there were moments when this action was revealed in a particularly definite way, as, for instance, when she renewed her vow of chastity, whilst she knelt during the consecration at the foot of the altar. As one of her earliest historians says, the impression that she then had was so sweet, consoling and strong, that the remembrance of it remained with her all her life, and was never obliterated by lapse of time or by her various occupations.[1]

[1] Languet, *Vie de la Vénérable sœur Marguerite Marie*, 1729, p. 4.

Another very remarkable proof of the action of God's grace in the child's soul was her love of retirement and prayer. Close to Lautecour, only two or three minutes' walk from the house where she lived, there still exists the little oak wood where it was her delight to spend hours alone with God, for He had already instructed the ignorant little girl on the chief points of the interior life by giving her the spirit of prayer.[1]

Her simple and touching piety and goodness, combined with her charming vivacity, won for her the affection of all with whom she lived or came in contact even for a short time. Mme. de Fautrières was particularly fond of her, and asked and obtained her parents' consent to her going to the château at Corcheval. We do not know whether Margaret stayed there for several years in succession,[2] or whether she only paid frequent visits to her godmother;[3] she seems to have been regarded, between the ages of four and eight, as more or less the adopted daughter of the mistress of Corcheval, and her residence in these aristocratic surroundings must have had some influence on the development of her soul and intellect. When Mme. de Fautrières took the child to live with her, she certainly intended to look after her education, but either her family and social duties or her failing health made it impossible for her to superintend it personally,

[1] Croiset, *Abrégé de la vie de la sœur Marguerite Marie*, new edition, with an introduction by C. Daniel, p. 3.

[2] Languet, *loc. cit.*; Bougaud, *Histoire*, p. 60.

[3] A. Hamon, *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite Marie*, p. 14.

and therefore she entrusted Margaret to two of her attendants, who were instructed to teach her the ordinary prayers and the elements of the catechism.

These two women differed greatly in character as well as in manner. One was lively, easy-going and indulgent, always ready to caress Margaret and to play with her. The other was gloomy, and had a stern and forbidding manner, especially towards her little charge, who, nevertheless, unlike other children of her age, was never happy away from her, in spite of the snubs that she so frequently received; whereas it was with difficulty that the little girl concealed her dislike of the other woman, although the latter tried in every way to win her affection. The child's unaccountable behaviour with regard to these women was explained later, when the one who was cheerful and attractive was found to be immoral, and everyone was astonished at the supernatural instinct which had led Margaret to detect and avoid the evil concealed under so plausible an exterior.

Yet, no matter who was her teacher, she was always an attentive pupil, doing her best to profit by her instruction, and we shall soon see how far she was successful in this respect. Meantime her piety, always tender and ardent, began to assume a more serious and thoughtful character. She was eager for solitude and silence, and sought them in the great woods and copses of Corcheval, as she had done in the little oak wood at Lautecour. But, as she meditated under the shade of the lofty forest trees, she did not only send forth vague aspirations

of love towards her Heavenly Father, but now her thoughts dwelt on what she was learning about God and His perfections and infinite goodness, and especially on Jesus Christ and the mysteries of His life. She had been taught, as far as she could understand, that God, though present everywhere, is present in a special manner in every Catholic church, and that our Lord, God and Man, remains really, body and soul, in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar.[1]

Thenceforth her chief desire and greatest delight were to pour out her soul before Him in the tabernacle. There was a chapel at Corcheval, opening on to the terrace of the château, and it was easy for Margaret to go there, so that, whenever she was not to be found in the house or garden, she was sure to be kneeling motionless before the Blessed Sacrament. She used to remain there for hours, feeling no fatigue, and only regretting when she was obliged to go away.

It was perhaps in 1654, and certainly not later than 1656, that Margaret ceased to visit or reside at Corcheval. In the former year M. de Fautrières died, and in the latter his widow married again; and these two events probably made it impossible for her godmother to keep the child with her any longer.

It was at about the same time that she suffered her first great sorrow. Her father, Claude Alacoque, died, after a very short illness, at the age of forty-one, and his death caused a complete change in

[1] Languet, p. 4; *cf. Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 35.

Margaret's mode of life. Hitherto, both at Corcheval and at Lautecour, she had been a member of a family, now she was sent to a convent school. Her father's affairs were somewhat in confusion, and consequently her mother had too much business to attend to for her to be able to look after the education of a large family. The two eldest sons had already been for some time at college, and Margaret was now put under the charge of the Urbanist sisters at Charolles.

The Urbanists were an offshoot of the Poor Clares, and took their name from Pope Urban IV, who, in the middle of the thirteenth century, had sanctioned in their favour some mitigations in St. Clare's original rule; but nevertheless the life led by these religious was very austere and most edifying. Their fasts and vigils and their long and fervent prayers won for them universal respect, and made a great impression upon Margaret, who had not previously been accustomed to convent practices, and had perhaps formed only some vague idea of them in her childish imagination. In her astonishment she decided at once that the convent at Charolles was the haven destined to receive and shelter her for life, although at the same time, wishing to be completely hidden in God and forgotten by creatures, she could not help regretting that her teachers were not, as she said, "sufficiently shut off" from the world. She knew, however, no other religious houses, and fancied that all were alike; and so, not venturing to let her ambition soar higher, she made up her mind that she would

one day take the veil in the convent which she had entered as a schoolgirl.

The Urbanists soon perceived how great a treasure God had entrusted to their charge, and seeing that in their new pupil piety, innocence and truthfulness were accompanied by a good knowledge of religion, which did credit to her teaching at Corcheval, they did not hesitate to let her make her first Communion only a few months after her admission to the school. She was barely nine years old; but she was well prepared for this great favour, and, pious and well-behaved as she had always been, she seemed from the time of her first Communion to have gained a great increase of fervour and devotion to all her duties. She experienced indescribable spiritual sweetness which, as she afterwards recorded, made her childish amusements and pleasures distasteful to her, so that she no longer cared for them, although she was anxious to do so.

In spite of the work of grace, which had been going on within her for five years, nature was still alive, and she was full of life and gaiety, and interested in all the amusements and work suited to her age. Sometimes nature gained the upper hand, and on these occasions Margaret displayed such boisterous high spirits that she seemed almost beside herself and intoxicated with merriment. But suddenly, in the midst of her excitement, she would feel the touch of Divine grace and at once the charm was broken, the fruits so fair to see and so delicious to taste were either cast aside or became distasteful even whilst she still held them, and a mysterious,

irresistible force drew her away from her light-hearted companions to some remote corner where, as soon as she was sure that she would not be seen, she would fall on her knees and weep, until her natural cheerfulness reasserted itself.

Thus, young as she was, she knew by experience that our moral nature is twofold, as St. Paul describes it in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Even the holiest souls know what it is alternately to soar with enthusiasm towards heaven and to sink down discouraged to earth; they experience the inward struggle of grace and nature typified by the angel wrestling with Jacob. God allows this struggle in order that we may be purified in the furnace of temptation, and derive from it instruction and encouragement; but sometimes it pleases Him to display His omnipotent power in the conflict, overthrowing the enemy, and compelling him, at least for a time, to abandon the field of battle. This was the case with Margaret Alacoque. For four years she was unable to leave her bed, being paralyzed and suffering agonies from rheumatism. She could not move, nor sleep, nor eat, and she derived no alleviation from the devoted care of her teachers, her mother's affection, or the treatment of her physician, whose remedies served only to aggravate her malady. She was about eleven years of age when this strange and persistent illness attacked her, and from the beginning she regarded it as sent by God, who made her suffer in body in order to benefit her soul. Mention has already been made of the resistance offered from time to time by

nature to the work of grace in the child's soul. At the end of this long trial she had acquired greater strength and courage in opposing and subduing the promptings of nature, and thus she showed that she had derived benefit from her affliction, and that our Divine Lord had let her share His sufferings that He might allow her to participate also in His best gifts.

During her weary days of enforced solitude and sleepless nights, her thoughts turned more and more to God, and we may believe what she herself recorded with touching simplicity—that her Divine Master then taught her how to make mental prayer.[1] As we have seen, she had long before begun to practise meditation, and had no doubt made rapid progress in it, yet, in her humility, she thought that she knew nothing about it, and had a great desire to find someone to teach her this science of the saints. "I felt myself," she says, "strongly attracted to the practice of mental prayer, and suffered acutely because I did not know how I ought to make it, nor had I any opportunity of learning, as I had nothing to do with spiritual persons; I only knew that the word 'meditation' filled my heart with joy." One day, when she felt unusually eager to drink of this mystic cup, although she knew not who could give it her, in spite of her having unawares often quenched her thirst from it, she heard within

[1] In her *Mémoire*, p. 345, she seems to assign this favour to a later period of her life, but, as has been often pointed out, she is not always accurate in recalling the order of events, and her chronology is not quite correct.

herself the voice of our Divine Master, who revealed to her one of the best methods, and gave her one of the rarest graces of meditation. This lesson, as she declares, was intended to last her all her life, but it seems that our Lord repeated it frequently. "He made me prostrate[1] myself humbly before Him," she says, "to ask forgiveness for all that I had done wrong, and then, after I had adored Him, I offered Him my prayer, not knowing how I ought to proceed. Thereupon He presented Himself to me in the mystery which He wished me to consider, and He laid hold of my mind, keeping my soul and all my faculties absorbed in Himself, so that I suffered no distractions."

Margaret accepted her sickness as coming from God, and regarded it as a token of His fatherly care for the sanctification of His little handmaid; and, in the same way, she understood that He alone could put an end to her sufferings, and that she must seek relief from Him and not from men. She succeeded in making her mother take the same view, and with her consent, and in union with her, she appealed to Our Lady, begging her to intercede with her Divine Son, and promising that, if restored to health, she would dedicate herself to Mary's service and become "one of her daughters." It was a vague promise, but the words suggest some

[1] The use of the word *prostrate* need not prevent us from referring these events to the time when Margaret was unable to move from her bed. She could not literally prostrate herself, but she could cast herself down and humble herself in spirit, by thinking of her sins.

foreshadowing of Margaret's special vocation and of the will of God, who was calling her to enter the Visitation Order, the members of which were then generally known as the "Daughters of Mary."

However this may be, Our Lady soon showed that she had heard the request. "No sooner had I made the promise than I was cured, and felt myself under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin, who took complete possession of my heart, and, treating me as her own, governed me as one dedicated to her service, correcting my faults and teaching me to do God's will." From her earliest childhood, Margaret had had a special devotion to the Mother of God. In all her difficulties and troubles she had recourse to Mary with childlike confidence. In her *Mémoire*, written at the bidding of her confessor, which is of the utmost value to us in tracing the history of her life, she says: "I did not venture to address her Divine Son, but I always turned to Our Lady." For some years she had fasted every Saturday in honour of the Blessed Virgin, and had said the Office of the Immaculate Conception, besides saying daily seven Aves in honour of the Seven Dolours, and the rosary, during which she made a genuflection for each Hail Mary, or else kissed the ground.

In return for all these acts of piety, Our Lady had taken the holy child under her special protection, giving her frequent proofs of it, and more than once, as we read in the *Mémoire*, delivering her from very great dangers. But after the fresh dedication of Margaret's self and of her whole life,

and after the sudden and miraculous cure that had been the immediate reward of this dedication, the daughter's devotion, on the one hand, and the Mother's loving care, on the other, increased and became more and more conspicuous.

When Margaret was well enough to leave her bed, she was no longer at Charolles, for her mother had taken her to Lautecour, hoping that she would recover her health more quickly at home. As soon as she was able to resume her ordinary life, she noticed a great change in her surroundings, of which she had hitherto been quite unaware. Madame Alacoque no longer occupied the same position as during her husband's lifetime. Then she had been mistress of the house, but now she was a dependent, and almost a servant, and this circumstance made a deep impression upon Margaret, so that her long physical sufferings were followed by other troubles, still harder to bear.

The house at Lautecour with the land surrounding it formed an estate of some importance, that had long been the property of a family named Delaroche; it did not originally belong to the Alacoques, but in 1613, Margaret's grandfather, having married Jeanne Delaroche, went to live with her parents, and became joint owner of the property. After his death, his son Claude continued to live there, but the estate was still owned jointly by the two families, and was not divided between them. Claude Alacoque, being the eldest son and also a good man of business, managed everything, both on the estate and in the house, where,

as we have seen, he caused the Alacoque coat of arms to be painted. He did not, however, occupy the whole house, but several of his relatives on both sides of the family lived with him; among others his mother, and his sister Benoîte and her husband Toussaint Delaroche. The latter was a narrow-minded and hard-hearted man, who was jealous of his brother-in-law's authority, and regarded the Alacoques almost as intruders upon the land that he inherited from his ancestors. He had no difficulty in inducing his mother-in-law to side with him, for she had long been suspected of favouring his branch of the family, and he worked also on his wife's feelings, as she was inclined to think that her brother Claude had benefited too much by their father's will.

After Claude's death there was no one to resist Delaroche and his partisans, who began to think of taking their revenge for having been obliged to occupy a subordinate position, and Toussaint Delaroche never rested until he had forced his sister-in-law to relinquish all authority in the house. She yielded, partly through weakness of character, and partly for the sake of her children, whose money matters were found to be in some confusion after their father's death. The royal notary had been too easy-going in his dealings with his creditors, and had not insisted upon their paying their debts. Toussaint, wishing for an excuse for his autocratic behaviour, pretended that it was his duty to look after his nephews' interests, and, once having taken matters into his own hands,

he had no consideration for his sister-in-law's feelings. His wife and mother-in-law followed his example and lost no opportunity of tyrannizing over Claude's widow and his daughter Margaret; they were helped in this pitiful task by a servant, who had grown old in the service of the Delaroche family, and who had gradually taken far too much upon herself, and used her power with all the brutality of a coarse and ignorant disposition.

Madame Claude Alacoque and her dearly loved child had to undergo real persecution at the hands of these people; but Margaret was far from denouncing them, and though she was obliged, in obedience to her director, to give some account of this sorrowful period of her youth, she never mentioned anyone by name nor wrote a word of blame, but was careful to employ only general expressions, which hardly enable us to identify the persons to whom they refer, whilst their gentleness bears witness to her truly angelic patience under persecution, and to her love of her enemies.

She regarded these women as innocent instruments of the will of God, and spoke of them as the friends and benefactresses of her soul. When we read her autobiography, we are at a loss to decide which touches and excites our sympathy most, whether it is the cruel treatment that she underwent, or the spirit of faith, resignation, and charity in this young girl, who, though only fifteen, had a lively intellect and a tender heart, which must have suffered intensely from the constant annoyances of her everyday life. In order to appreciate duly

both her trials and her goodness, we must refer to what she wrote herself. She says:

"My mother had been deprived of her authority in the house, and it had been bestowed upon others, who used it in such a way that neither she nor I could ever be more completely in captivity. Not that I wish to blame these persons in what I am about to say (for God did not allow me to think of doing so), but I regard them only as the instruments of which He made use in accomplishing His holy will. We possessed, therefore, no authority in the house, and dared not do anything without leave. A constant warfare went on, and everything was kept under lock and key, so that often I had nothing to wear when I was going to Holy Mass, unless I borrowed a cap and some clothes. It was then that I began to feel my bondage, in which I was held so closely that I could do nothing, nor go out at all, without the consent of three persons.

"At this time all my desire was to seek happiness and comfort in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar, but as I lived in a village at some distance from the church, I could not go there without the consent of these persons, and it sometimes happened that one would give and another refuse her consent to my going; and often when my tears bore witness to my sorrow, I was reproached with having arranged to meet some boys, and told that it was much better for me not to be allowed to meet them, under the pretext of wishing to go to Mass or to Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. I had such a horror of all such things that I would

rather have been torn to pieces than have cherished such a thought. I did not know where to go, but took refuge in some corner of the garden, or in the stable, or in some other hiding-place, where it was possible for me to kneel down and with tears pour forth my heart to God, through the Blessed Virgin, my good Mother, in whom I had put all my trust. I used to remain there for the whole day, having nothing to eat or drink. . . . Sometimes some of the poor people in the village took pity upon me, and gave me a little milk or some fruit in the evening. Then, when I went back to the house, I was in such a state of fear and trembling that I might have been a poor criminal going to hear her condemnation, and I should have been far happier begging my bread than leading that existence, for often I did not venture to take any food at table. No sooner did I enter the house than the storm broke out afresh, because I had not done the household work or taken care of the children of these dear benefactresses of my soul, and, without being permitted to utter a single word, I used to set to work with the servants."

From the age of fifteen to that of eighteen Margaret was constantly exposed to cruel persecutions of this sort; but, as if they were not enough, she had to suffer another sorrow, which was the most painful of all, as she says herself.

"The heaviest of my crosses was my inability to lighten those laid upon my mother, which I found a hundred times harder to bear than my own, although I did not allow her the consolation of

saying a word to me on the subject, for fear lest we might offend God by finding relief in talking of our sorrows. When she was ill I suffered acutely, for, being left completely to my care, she was in great pain, and, as sometimes everything was locked up, I was obliged to go and beg for eggs and other things necessary for sick people. This was no small trial to me, as I was naturally timid, and the villagers often said more to me than I liked. She had once a dangerous attack of erysipelas in her head, and the swelling was terribly hard and inflamed, but nothing was done for her except that she was bled by a little village surgeon who happened to be passing, and who told me that she could not recover unless by a miracle. Nobody troubled about her except myself, and I did not know to whom to have recourse nor whom to ask for help, except those to whom I always went in my troubles, the Blessed Virgin and our dear Lord and Master."[1]

These two powerful protectors did not fail her, and perhaps God permitted things to come to such a pass only that He might display His love of His child of predilection more plainly. She was on the verge of despair, reproaching herself with her sins, and regarding them as the reason why God punished her by striking down her mother, the being whom she loved most on earth, when the cure, which nothing short of a miracle seemed able to effect, took place almost instantaneously. Margaret gives us the following account of it:

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, pp. 340, 344 *et seq.*

"In the agony of mind that I suffered incessantly, as, in addition to my anxiety, I met with nothing but ridicule, insults, and false accusations, I knew not to whom to have recourse. I went to Mass on the day of Our Lord's Circumcision to ask Him to be the physician and the means of curing my poor mother, and to teach me what I ought to do for her, and He acted so mercifully that, when I reached home, I found her cheek had burst, and that there was a wound on it as large as the palm of my hand, emitting an unbearable smell, so that no one would go near her. I had no idea how to dress wounds, nor had I been able to look at or to touch them before I saw this one, for which I had no remedies beyond those of Divine Providence. Every day I used to cut away a quantity of decayed flesh, but I felt so much courage and confidence in my Lord's goodness (for He seemed to be always present), that finally she was cured in a very few days, contrary to all human expectation."[1]

A few years previously Margaret had been cured herself after making a vow to Our Lady, and now by her prayers and tears she obtained her mother's restoration to health. In vain does she show in this account of her illness all the reticence and reserve that her humility suggested to her. It seems difficult to ascribe to purely natural causes this sudden restoration of one who was neglected by everybody and apparently at the point of death, and we cannot fail to see in it a direct answer to the young girl's prayers and a reward for her devo-

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 344 *et seq.*

tion and goodness—a proof, in fact, of God's great love for her.

None the less she continued to regard herself as a great sinner, and speaks of her "crimes" as having drawn down the wrath of Heaven on herself and her family. She accuses herself with so much conviction, and is so eager to bewail her sins, that we have no hesitation in maintaining that even her biographers have been misled, for they have taken literally her pious exaggeration, which proceeded from a conscience so tender as to be actually scrupulous, giving way occasionally to very curious ideas. Some writers have supposed that at this period she was sometimes forgetful of the resolutions and promises made during her illness, and that, in consequence of the momentary awakening of nature within her, she let herself now and then be, as she says, led into vanity and love of creatures, caring only for her own little amusements and for enjoyment. Even if these lapses into the spirit and distractions of the world were very rare and short-lived, as they are supposed to have been, it is still difficult to see when they could have occurred at all, in the midst of the domestic strife to which she was almost incessantly exposed. No doubt there were rare occasions when for a brief space she succeeded in escaping from the vexatious vigilance of her enemies, but she herself has told us how she employed this time.

The reader will remember that there was a little oak wood close to her parents' house, where Margaret loved to go, even when she was a tiny child,

in order to be alone with God. Beyond this wood the ground slopes rapidly down to a deep, narrow valley, on the other side of which is a hill crowned by the parish church of Verosvres. Whenever by her prayers she had prevailed upon the women who controlled her actions to give her a little liberty, she ran through the wood and down the slope, crossed the valley, and climbed the hill to the church. "I could not," she says, "remain at the back of the church, and although I felt some confusion, I never failed to go as close as I could to the Blessed Sacrament." There, kneeling on the pavement, she never uttered any vocal prayers, but, she adds, "I felt so completely absorbed that I never grew weary, and I could have spent whole days and nights there without eating or drinking, and without being aware of what I was doing, only being consumed in His presence like a burning taper, so as to give Him love in return for love."[1]

When reading the *Mémoire* of St. Margaret Mary we must not overlook the prayer at the beginning of it, for it reveals to us the intention with which she wrote. It is: "O my Supreme Good, may I write nothing save for Thy greater glory and my greater humiliation!" (p. 337). We must remember moreover that as a rule she pays very little attention to the order of events, and that she often groups together occurrences which may belong to very different periods, although, to judge by her account of them, they might seem to be all of the same date. Therefore, in the pages that we

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 346.

have been considering, it is quite likely that she is classing together, in order to include them in one act of contrition, all the instances of infidelity to grace which she could remember, and is making a sort of general confession of them, conceived in the same spirit as that which we shall meet with shortly.

After these remarks, let us try to measure the gravity of the sins, as a punishment for which she regarded all the vexations and ill-treatment that she suffered from her fifteenth to her eighteenth year, being wounded not only in her refinement and pride, but still more in her love of her mother. Let us examine the nature of the sins which she thought could never be expiated, and which, in her opinion, deserved a far more severe chastisement than she received.

We may select one fault which she regarded as a grievous sin, never ceasing to regret it. She says: "One day during the Carnival, being with some other young girls, I dressed myself up, having a foolish desire to please them."

Most of Margaret's biographers, overlooking her carelessness about chronology, have taken these words as referring to her life when she was nearly grown up, and have believed that on this occasion she yielded to the seductions of the world, and was overcome by a temptation to coquetry and vanity. She herself gives us no clue to the date of this occurrence, but it is supplied by her brother Chrysostom, who says positively that she was only five years old at the time.[1] When the incident is rele-

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, pp. 347, 382.

gated to its proper place in her life, it seems quite insignificant, and merely a matter of childish play of a perfectly innocent description.

We may therefore conclude that the young girl was far from being as blameworthy as she would have us suppose, and that she adhered, in writing her *Mémoire*, almost too closely to her resolution that she would record only what tended to her greater humiliation. We cannot doubt that she suffered cruelly during her youth, but she certainly committed no sins calling for such a punishment, although we do not assume that nature was dead within her, nor that she never fell into sin.

We have traced the course of her life up to the age of eighteen, when her mother, brothers, and even those who for five years had been treating her with the utmost cruelty were all anxious to find a suitable and wealthy husband for her, and to see her settled in a home of her own. Thus she was drawn in two directions at once—towards God and towards the world; and though she had moments of weakness and indecision, they only rendered her final triumph more glorious, because it cost her a struggle and was won at a heavy cost.

CHAPTER II

VOCATION

PÈRE DE RAVIGNAN, in his work *de l'Existence et de l'Institut des Jésuites*, p. 71, gives an eloquent description of the anxiety and irresolution of a young soul, who, standing on the threshold of life, seeks to ascertain her vocation, striving to make, in the sight of God, the choice that He has already made for her. "The soul," he says, "thinks of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, of the end awaiting every wayfarer in this world, and of all legitimate states and conditions of life. She is free, yet subjected to an inward conflict between two irreconcilable influences. To what turmoils and storms is she not exposed! How many struggles and alternatives disturb her peace! She is, as it were, in a stormy sea; the waves toss her up and down, and she is balanced between two worlds, between two eternities."

This passage seems to contain a short account of what went on in Margaret's soul during the six years that still elapsed before she entered the noviciate at Paray.

She had long been wholly dedicated to God, and her inborn love of prayer, solitude, and purity, her abhorrence of evil, her promises and vows, all

seemed to draw her quietly but irresistibly towards the cloister. We can hardly imagine that at any moment in her early life she cherished a thought or desire of becoming anything but a nun.

During the period that we are about to consider, she had to resist not only the pressure put upon her by those around her, many of whom were very dear to her, but also the impulses and inclinations of her own nature. God had been calling her and drawing her sweetly and strongly to Himself from her earliest childhood, wishing her to be wholly His; but He desired that her self-surrender should be free and voluntary, and the result of both a sacrifice and a victory.

When Margaret reached the age of eighteen, the household at Lautecour was in mourning, having been visited by death twice within two years. Her two eldest brothers, Jean and Claude Philibert, had died in their early manhood, each at the age of twenty-three, the former in 1663 and the latter in 1665. This double sorrow had been a great trial to Madame Alacoque, for not only did she grieve over the death of her sons, but she lost the hope that she had entertained of being at length delivered from the bondage in which she had been for nearly ten years. She had trusted that, when her eldest sons reached manhood and returned home after completing their education, they would be her natural protectors against the persistent hostility of her enemies. When they died, all her hopes centred upon her daughter; and, knowing her to be most loving and devoted, she desired above all

things that Margaret should marry, and take her to live with her in her new home.

Her two youngest sons were not yet of an age to assert themselves and to defend her against the Delaroches, and she saw no other means of escape from the tyranny that she endured in her own house. Margaret was old enough to marry, and her mother determined, with the help of her own relatives and of the Delaroches (who must have had some motive for assisting Madame Alacoque in this matter), to induce her to select one of the various suitors who were coming forward, for she was a very good match, belonging, as she did, to one of the most highly respected families of the upper middle class, and being connected with the nobility of the country.

She was not a great heiress, but possessed a very fair dowry, according to the ideas of the time, for although her uncle, Toussaint Delaroche, had been harsh in his dealings with her and her mother, we must at least acknowledge that he had looked after their property well, and, in his capacity as their trustee, had been perfectly honest, displaying much prudence and business ability, so that, thanks to him, their money affairs were in a much better condition than they had been at Claude Alacoque's death. These advantages were, however, external, and not connected with Margaret's personal merits and attractiveness.

She possessed considerable beauty, much vivacity, and her sweetness and brightness had remained unspoilt by all the trials she had undergone; there was a sort of charm about her that was due to her

natural goodness and to the purity of her soul. She had displayed true heroism in her attempts to console her mother and in her own acceptance of so many griefs, privations, and insults. In short, her good qualities and her many virtues made her loved and appreciated by all. At Verosvres, as we can see if we read between the lines of her own memoir, the peasants were loud in their protests against the unjust persecution that she had suffered, and in the neighbourhood, and even in the châteaux of the province, there were not a few young men who wished to marry her, and many parents who would have welcomed her as a daughter-in-law.

Whilst Madame Alacoque was doing her utmost to hurry on her daughter's marriage, she began also to plan that of Chrysostom, the elder of her two surviving sons, although he was not yet twenty. These schemes were encouraged by the Delaroches, and consequently the atmosphere of the household at Lautecour underwent a sudden change, and whereas of late the silence had been broken only by the sound of quarrels, life and animation now returned, and many receptions and entertainments were held. Crowds of visitors arrived, and relatives and friends were frequently invited to dinners and social gatherings, which took place in Margaret's honour, and of which she was the chief ornament. The world and its allurements once more sought to captivate her, and she seemed inclined to yield and offer no great resistance to them. As a little child, and also when she was at school at Charolles, her lively and excitable nature had made her throw

herself into all the amusements suited to her age, and although for some years her vivacity had been subdued by the hard conditions imposed upon her by the hostility of those around her, it now appeared to have reasserted itself. She was, perhaps, not indifferent to the delights of being admired and loved, yet this was not the chief danger to be feared. Although occasionally she seemed to yield to the enticements of the world, so that she, who had been so patient and so fervent in adversity, was apparently disposed to lose all her fervour, it was because she could not bring herself to offer open opposition to her mother's plans for her future. Every day she was obliged to listen to Madame Alacoque's complaints and prayers, and to see her weeping, and such incessant appeals could not fail to make a deep impression upon her, for she had the greatest affection for her devoted mother. She says: "The devil availed himself of my tenderness and love of my mother, reminding me constantly of the tears that she was shedding, and suggesting to me that, if I really became a nun, she might die of sorrow, and I should be answerable to God, as she relied completely upon me for care and attention. This thought caused me intolerable torture, for I loved her as tenderly as she loved me, so that we could not bear being unable to see one another."[1]

Margaret then began to examine the vow that she had made when still a child, not understanding either its meaning or its object. She asked herself whether it was really binding upon her conscience.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 348.

There was also the solemn promise to Our Lady, made during her long illness, and apparently ratified by heaven, since she had obtained the desired restoration to health. She reflected that she was still very young at that time, and perhaps incapable of pledging herself irrevocably for life. Moreover, the promise had been vague, and she might be able to remain in the world without breaking it, and, in any case, she could easily obtain a dispensation from it.

In this way she began to listen to the suggestions of the evil one, who with truly diabolical cunning touched her at her most vulnerable point, taking advantage of her piety and humility. He represented the religious life to her alternately as too high for her on account of her weakness, and as unable to satisfy her craving for the greatest and most austere perfection. Tossed to and fro between these antagonistic ideas, at one moment she feared, as she tells us, to renounce her liberty, since she would no longer be able to continue to fast, give alms, and discipline herself as she wished, at another time she was alarmed at her own presumption, believing that the religious life required such great sanctity in those entering upon it, that it would never be possible for her to attain to it, and that she would be lost.[1]

The devil, taking advantage of her perplexity, then dealt her a crushing blow: "Unhappy girl," he said, "what is the good of your becoming a nun? You will make yourself the laughing-stock of everybody, for you will never persevere,

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 348.

and you will be overwhelmed with confusion when you have to take off the religious habit and return to the world. Where will you find a hiding-place after that?"[1]

These suggestions of the evil one, added to the persuasion of her relatives and the pitiful prayers of her mother, influenced Margaret so far that her courage failed, and she was on the point of abandoning all the thoughts and aspirations that she had cherished from her childhood. She says: "Being no longer able to resist the persecution of my family, nor the tears of my mother, whom I loved so dearly . . . I began to think of the world and to deck myself out in its honour, seeking to distract myself as much as possible."[2]

The world, looking only at externals, must have fancied that it had triumphed, and that henceforth Margaret would be its own possession; but, if it had been able to see her heart, it would have perceived that the struggle of ten years before had been renewed, and was more violent and painful than ever. The world and its charms had no real attraction for her; she tells us herself that she was naturally inclined to gaiety and amusements, but the Divine Master, to Whom she had solemnly given herself, did not cease to claim her. He had never acknowledged the rights of His rival, and we can learn this from St. Margaret Mary's own words. After confessing her weakness, and partially revealing the secret struggle that was

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 355.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 355 and 349.

going on in her heart, she adds: "Thou, O my God, alone didst witness the greatness and length of the terrible conflict that I endured within me, to which I should have yielded innumerable times, had it not been for the extraordinary support of Thy merciful goodness, which had quite other designs upon me than those that I formed in my own heart. Thou didst show me how hard and difficult it would be to kick against the powerful goad of Thy love, and in the midst of entertainments and amusements, Thou didst send forth burning arrows to pierce and consume my whole heart, so that I suffered pain which stupefied me, and, that not being enough for a heart so ungrateful as my own, to make it relax its hold, I felt myself bound, as it were, with cords, and forcibly drawn along, until at length I was constrained to follow Him who was calling me to some secret spot, where He reproached me bitterly, for He was jealous of my wretched heart, which suffered such terrible persecutions. When I had asked His pardon, kneeling with my face bent down to the ground, He bade me take a long and severe discipline, after which I went back again as before to my opposition and vanity."[1]

We may say at once that we must beware of taking Margaret's statements too literally, when she charges herself with resisting God's grace, and with taking sinful pleasure in the vanities of the world. Her humility and excessive tenderness of conscience led her habitually to exaggerate her

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 349.

faults, and we ought to modify what she says by comparing it with the account given by her brother Chrysostom. When he recalled this period in his sister's life, at which her vocation was put to so decisive and delicate a test, he said: "Her mother, wishing her to make a good marriage, thought that when she was given the choice of the most fashionable materials, she would choose the most elegant, but, on the contrary, with her usual humility and modesty, she chose the commonest."[1]

If we accepted her own version of the story, we might suspect her of yielding to love of dress, at least now and then, when she was dazzled by the world. She says: "I began to deck myself out in order to please it." It may be urged that Chrysostom, when writing the passage quoted above, was recalling the memories of half a century, and might easily be a little misled by his veneration for a sister who had died in the odour of sanctity. Still, even if this is the case, after reading his testimony, we cannot but modify to some extent the idea that Margaret gives us of her worldliness, and believe that in choosing her clothes she was more anxious not to exceed the limits of modest simplicity than to shine in the world and attract admiration by her elegance.

There are other points on which we must make use of her brother's statements in order to soften down and correct Margaret's accusations against herself. For instance, we hear of a sudden change in the way of life at Lautecour, which had long

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 391.

been a gloomy and abandoned place, but all at once was crowded with visitors, and especially with young men, attracted by the prospects of making a good match. Margaret describes this transformation, and seems to suggest that a metamorphosis, no less sudden and complete, took place in herself, and that she began to lead, at least for a time, quite a worldly life, from which her old practices of piety and penance were excluded, and in which her spirit of faith and fervour, which had hitherto filled her heart, ceased to be felt. Chrysostom writes very differently, and says: "She was very fond of retirement, avoiding all social gatherings where she thought any offence might be offered to God; and it often happened that when she was invited to go to any such assembly, she would feign some indisposition. When people came to see her, she turned the conversation upon topics connected with God or the salvation of souls, and when the subject was changed, she paid so little attention that she was often distracted, and gave no answers."[1]

As if wishing to deny the justice of the reproaches addressed by Margaret to herself for having wasted precious time in listening to frivolous conversations and in amusements, he goes on to say: "As she detested idleness, we often heard her declare that we ought to regret the time wasted on unprofitable conversations, and she did her best to avoid them, when obedience or politeness forced her to take part in them. It is true to assert that she compensated at night for any time thus wasted during

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 391.

the day, for she deducted it from her hours of sleep."

We cannot deny that there may be a little exaggeration on both sides; Margaret speaks of herself often with excessive severity, whilst Chrysostom occasionally allows himself to err on the side of panegyric. Probably we ought to seek truth where, like virtue, it is apt to be found—namely, midway between two extremes, and we may believe that she never forgot her duty as a Christian, nor failed to edify all who knew her, although possibly, during this trial, that assailed her when she was eighteen and lasted two or three years, she may have partially yielded to the persuasion of her mother and other relatives, and perhaps, as she declares, also to a certain taste for the world, and was tempted to doubt the reality of her vocation, and inclined to accede to the desires of her family. In speaking of her interior sufferings at that time, she says: "My fear of offending God tormented me more than anything else."[1]

It would be unfair to blame her for the troubles and difficulties that caused her so much suffering that she speaks of them herself as a "martyrdom."

We must also acknowledge that, having received so many graces, and being bound to her heavenly Spouse by so long and constant an interchange of benefits and by oaths of fidelity, it is not astonishing if, in all that concerned Him, her conscience was excessively sensitive, and if she reproached herself for things which would not have given rise to the

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 351.

smallest scruple in an ordinary Christian, and sought to expiate these slight faults with extraordinary severity.

From the account that she has left us, written by order of her confessor, we know that she tried to make reparation, by means of terrible penances, for the faults by which she believed herself to have offended her Divine Master. "To punish myself," she says, "in some way for the wrongs that I committed against Him, and to regain my likeness to and conformity with Him, whilst assuaging the grief that lay heavy upon me, I bound my wretched, sinful body with knotted ropes, drawing them so close that I could hardly breathe or eat. I wore these ropes for so long that they sank, as it were, deeply into my flesh, which began to grow over them, and I had to use great violence and suffer cruel pain when I pulled them off. The same is true of the little chains which I fastened on my arms, and which dragged away pieces of skin when I removed them. Moreover, I used to sleep upon a plank, or on sticks with sharp knots in them; and besides that I used to take the discipline, trying to discover some alleviation for the struggles and pain that I suffered within me, in comparison with which all the external pain that I could undergo seemed merely a refreshment."[1]

In thus cruelly torturing herself, she was no doubt trying to satisfy her craving to suffer in expiation for her sins, but she also desired to gain light to put an end to her irresolution, and to the

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 350.

inward torments of which she speaks. Unhappily she had no guide to help her on her way, and enable her to discover God's will with regard to herself. Her confessor, the parish priest of Verosvres, was a relative; he was an excellent man, but narrow-minded and weak in character, unable to understand such a disposition as Margaret's, or to help being influenced by the petty gossip and prejudices of those around him. He increased her state of perplexity, instead of alleviating it, and he seems to have been somewhat infected with Jansenism, for he was extremely unwilling to allow her to receive the Holy Eucharist, which was her chief source of strength and comfort. In writing of the time that immediately preceded her entrance into the convent, she says: "My greatest joy in leaving the world was to think that I should be able to communicate more often, for I had been permitted to do so only very rarely, and I should have deemed myself the happiest person in the world if I had been able to communicate frequently."[1]

She was therefore at this time without the help of any director worthy of the name, although all the masters of the spiritual life, basing their opinion on Holy Scripture and on tradition, tell us that this is a support indispensable to a soul anxious to walk in the way of perfection.

It is true that, instead of an earthly director, she had as counsellor and guide our Lord Himself, who is wont to enlighten those who direct the consciences of others. One day, when she was com-

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 359.

plaining most bitterly of being thus abandoned in the midst of her anxieties, and deprived of all human help, she addressed her Divine Master, saying: "Alas, my Lord! give me someone to guide me to Thee." "Am I not enough for thee?" was His reply. "What dost thou fear? Can a child, loved as I love thee, perish in the arms of an Almighty Father?"[1]

Very often, however, her humility prevented her from benefiting by His assistance, and from recognizing the voice of Him who spoke to her in the depths of her heart. She was too thoroughly convinced of her unworthiness to believe that the God of all sanctity would ever consent to stoop to her, and consequently she supposed herself to be a prey to illusions proceeding from the devil.

She had not much longer to wait before light was destined to dawn in her soul, putting to flight all her misgivings and banishing all her irresolution. It was probably in the course of the year 1667 that she felt the revival within herself, in a more intense and exclusive manner than ever, of the attraction that she had always experienced for the religious virtues, and especially for those which are the object of the solemn vows taken by one who is bidding farewell to the world and entering upon the religious life. She perceived the beauty and greatness of these virtues more than she had ever done before, and knew them to be indispensable, if she were ever to enjoy peace of mind and secure the salvation of her soul. She was certain that the religious

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 360.

life was what she wanted, and that in it alone she would find the full satisfaction of all her needs, and the perfect development of all the faculties of her being. She was at length sure that God was calling her, and, like Samuel, she had at last recognized His voice, and so she made up her mind once for all—not only was she thenceforth determined to be a nun, cost what it might, but she began at once to practise the mode of life to which she had so clear and strong a vocation; and whilst still in the world, in the midst of her own family, she went through a real preliminary noviciate.

She dared not yet make known her resolution to her mother and relatives; but all about her must certainly have had some suspicion of the change in her, for they could not fail to notice the alteration in her habits. We have seen that she had no real ground for reproaching herself with having yielded too much to the spirit of the world, and having shared too readily in its amusements; but, after making up her mind to embrace the religious life, she refused to have anything more to do with the world, and divided her time into two parts, one of which she devoted to prayer, reading pious books and making long meditations, the other was spent in helping the poor, tending the sick, and teaching children. In doing these works of mercy and charity she displayed the spirit of self-denial and self-sacrifice of which she had already given so many proofs, and which never ceased to increase within her year by year.

She never could look at a wound or an abscess

without feeling sick and faint; but, being determined to overcome this natural weakness, she made it her practice to kiss all wounds, however repulsive, when she was attending to the sick. Such a vigorous and fearless effort to conquer herself could not but be successful, and ere long she had triumphed over her natural squeamishness and repugnance. Nor was this the only reward of her courage, for, though ignorant of medicine, and having no remedies, as she says, but those supplied by Providence, the wounds that she dressed healed very rapidly, as soon as they had ceased to fill her with horror. We may perhaps believe that there was something supernatural in her successful treatment of the sick, and we may share the conviction of those who refused all other remedies, ascribing to her a mysterious power which, in their opinion, was able to cure the most dangerous maladies. She seems, without knowing it, to suggest that this was the case; for, after mentioning the remedies "supplied by Providence," she adds: "I had more confidence in God's goodness than in exterior treatment," not noticing that, by using these words, she is acknowledging her cures to be due, less to any natural means at her disposal, than to God's action, elicited by her prayers and virtues.

In satisfying her desire to do good, Margaret had to struggle not only against herself and her own natural repugnance, but also against her enemies in her own household, with whom she had long been at variance, and whose jealous hostility, after being appeased for a short time, broke out

afresh in a more violent and tyrannical form than ever.

At Verosvres and in the neighbourhood were many children, neglected by their parents, who were either too poor or too much overwhelmed by their daily work to take any care of them. These unhappy little creatures were growing up in the most absolute destitution and ignorance, knowing nothing of their duty towards God. Margaret took pity upon them, and set to work to gather them round her, so that she might teach them the catechism, civilize them, and supply their needs, as far as her slender resources allowed. This undertaking was most praiseworthy, but was accompanied by certain drawbacks, for all these little vagabonds had manners and customs quite out of keeping with the correct and polished behaviour of the ordinary visitors at Lautecour. On fine days in summer Margaret was able to collect them in the open air, either in the garden or in one of the courtyards on the estate; but in winter, and when it rained, they had to seek shelter in the house, where they made a great deal of noise and were considerably in the way. Even Margaret's brothers could not refrain from showing some annoyance, though they did so gently and in a tone of friendly sarcasm.

One day Chrysostom entered his sister's room, and, finding her in the midst of a crowd of little ragamuffins, said: "Do you mean to be a schoolmistress, sister?"

"Forgive me, dear brother," was her reply, "but

these poor children would otherwise perhaps never receive any instruction;" and the lesson went on without further interruption.

On other occasions her grandmother or her Aunt Delaroche would burst into her little school, and drive out both pupils and teacher, hurling at them all, but especially at Margaret, the most insulting remarks, which, however, did not discourage them, for the lessons were resumed on the following day. Her charity towards her little protégés brought upon her another still more cruel insult. In order to make them attend her instructions and to relieve their misery and poverty, she used to give them little presents and distribute among them the small sum of money that was at her disposal. Her relatives accused her of stealing what she gave away, and of bestowing all that she could get hold of in alms. "But," she adds, "I should never have dared to do this . . . and I gave away only what belonged to me; and even this I should not have ventured to do if it involved disobedience, so I used to coax my mother to let me give away what I had."[1]

Madame Alacoque, tired of these incessant requests and annoyed at seeing her daughter deprive herself of everything, would sometimes refuse her consent, and Margaret would then silently withdraw, returning to the charge after a time, and displaying so much quiet persistence, sweetness, and humility that in the end she always had her own way. Who can blame her for a piece of diplomacy so unselfish in its object and so touching in its cause? In

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, pp. 382, 383.

carrying her scruples so far as to refuse to dispose of what was her own property without her mother's permission, she was not influenced only by tenderness of conscience, but also by another motive, which she describes in the following words: "I could no longer do anything without asking leave, not of my mother alone, but I subjected myself also to those with whom I lived, although this was a continual trial to me. I thought it my duty to submit to all the people to whom I felt most repugnance, and to obey them, in order to try if I could be a nun."[1]

In giving her a vocation to the religious state God had also given her the spirit of that state, and had taught her that obedience is the first and chief virtue, being, as Bossuet says in his Exhortation to the Ursulines at Meaux, "the solid foundation of the religious life." Margaret was so fully convinced of this truth that she practised obedience in a most heroic degree, setting no limits to it. She obeyed not only her mother, but also her grandmother and aunt, and even those "to whom she might have given orders," especially the cross old servant, who claimed an authority to which she had no right, and which she rendered unbearable by her coarse behaviour.

Surely it may be said with perfect truth that before Margaret entered the noviciate at Paray she had already passed through one at Lautecour, in comparison with which her real noviciate at Paray might well seem very easy.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres.* II. p. 353.

In addition to all the trials that she underwent voluntarily and endured so bravely, there was another that caused her even more suffering. Her mother and brothers, as well as the Delaroches, all united in making one final attempt to induce her to marry. She was then twenty years of age, and they represented to her that it was time for her to take a husband, telling her that if she became a nun she would kill her mother, and be answerable before God for her death. She ought, therefore, to remain in the world, and choose as husband one who would help her to be the stay and comfort of this dearly-loved mother.

Her youngest brother, Jacques, who was destined for the priesthood, offered to help her out of his own means, and to share with her whatever he could claim of his father's property; for he thought that in this way he could make matters easier for his sister, since her dowry would be increased, and she would be in a position to contract an alliance with one of the best families in the country. Such a marriage would be most pleasing to her relatives, as it would secure for them greater consideration and respect.

But just as the world was exerting itself to detain one whose sole desire was to leave it, God came to her assistance in so powerful and efficacious a manner that she triumphed over both the world and herself. One morning she had received Holy Communion and was turning away from the altar-rail, when she seemed to behold Our Lord, who revealed Himself to her as "the handsomest,

richest, most powerful, most perfect, and most accomplished of lovers" He reproached her gently, saying: "Why is it that after being pledged to Me for so many years you now wish to break with Me and take another lover? If you offer Me this insult, I shall abandon you for ever, but if you are true to Me, I will never leave you, and will make you victorious over all your enemies. I forgive your ignorance because you do not know Me yet, but if you are faithful and follow Me, I will teach you to know Me, and will reveal Myself to you."[1]

At the same time, wishing to give her a token of His presence and power, God filled her mind with light and peace, allowing her to feel such joy and assurance that she could not doubt who it was whom she saw and heard. Our Lord reassured her so completely on the subject of her vocation that she ventured to break the silence imposed upon her by her timidity, and to make known her intentions to her family. She did this with so much decision and emphasis that no one dared to reply, nor to utter any protest, nor to raise the least objection. After she had so plainly stated what she meant to do, the suitors who had been frequent visitors at Lautecour withdrew one after another, and neither her mother nor her brothers said anything more on the subject of her marriage. Her mother was careful not to weep in her presence, although she could not refrain from tears when alone or with friends who mentioned her daughter. Margaret

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, pp. 355, 356.

could not fail to be affected by this deep and touching sorrow, but, being now sure that she was doing God's will, she remained, as she says, firm as a rock, for she trusted that Our Lord would Himself come to the aid of her dear mother and wipe away her tears. Meantime, in order to obtain this favour, she offered up her mother's tears as part of her own sacrifice, protesting that "even though it should cost her a thousand lives, she would never be anything but a nun."[1]

However, three long years had still to pass before she could go to Paray and ask for admission to the convent. What was the hindrance that prevented her entering sooner upon the religious life? As far as we can make out from the somewhat obscure statements of contemporaneous writers, she was hindered by a very commonplace difficulty, such as often occurs, and has a marked influence on the course of human events. She seems to have been unable to raise her dowry. Her brother Chrysostom ought to have paid it, but, as he had married in the previous year, he could not pay a large sum of money without exposing himself to some inconvenience. By his marriage he had become connected with a family in some respects superior to his own, either actually belonging to the nobility of the country, or being very closely allied with it. On January 30, 1666, he had married Angélique Aumonier, daughter of Moïse Aumonier, lord of the manor of Chalanforge, and of Huguette de Chapon de la Bouthière, whose family was connected with that of Margaret's

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 357.

godmother, Mme. de Fautrières. On the occasion of this marriage, and no doubt in order to facilitate it, Mme. Alacoque made over all her property to her eldest surviving son, who in return undertook to provide for her, during her lifetime, in accordance with her rank. As head of the family, he made himself responsible also for his sister Margaret and his brother Jacques. The marriage contract between Chrysostom Alacoque and Angélique Aumonier is given in Bougaud's *Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, chapter iii., page 90, and note 5, page 527; according to it, he promised to give a dowry to Margaret, when she should make an honourable marriage, or come of age, and also he pledged himself to defray all the expenses connected with his brother's education for the priesthood, in case Jacques desired his assistance.

Chrysostom fully intended to keep his word, but his wedding probably cost a great deal of money, and for some time after it he was not in a position to fulfil his engagements, more especially with regard to the payment of Margaret's dowry.

Although this delay must have caused her much sorrow, Margaret submitted to it without a murmur, displaying her usual patience and sweetness. From time to time Chrysostom's conscience reproached him with causing his sister to wait so long before she could carry out her intentions, and then he tried to make excuses to her for his conduct, but she used to interrupt him, saying in the most affectionate way: "What are you talking about, dear brother? You stand to me in the place of my father, and I

would rather remain as I am for the rest of my life than put you to any inconvenience."[1]

In order to gain time, and perhaps with some secret hope of turning her thoughts into other channels, Margaret's family determined to send her to Macon, to spend a few months with her uncle, Philibert Lamyn, Mme. Alacoque's brother, who on Claude Alacoque's death had become guardian of Margaret and her brothers, jointly with Toussaint Delaroche. He had a great and very special affection for his ward, and was a most honourable man, holding the offices of royal notary and proctor to the bailiwick and court of justice of Macon. He was an exemplary Christian, and had given two of his children to God; one son had joined the Friars Preachers, or, as they were then called, the Jacobins; and one daughter had taken the veil among the Ursulines, and was then living in the house that these religious had occupied at Macon since the year 1615. Her name in religion was Sister St. Columba, and she had no sooner made acquaintance with Margaret, than she conceived the deepest affection for her, and the two cousins often used to meet in the parlour of the Ursuline Convent, and exchange their confidences with the utmost freedom, so that soon they had no secrets from one another. Margaret's vocation was a frequent subject of conversation. Although she was firmly resolved upon being a nun, she had not decided which Order and which convent she would enter. Ten years before, during her long illness at

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 394.

Charolles, she had obeyed an inward inspiration, and had promised Our Lady to be some day one of her daughters, and possibly we may regard this promise as foreshadowing her future life. This presentiment, however, if it really existed, was very vague, and probably transient. She tells us herself, when speaking of her visits to the Ursulines, and of her determination to give herself to God: "I did not know where this was to be, nor which religious Order I was to enter."[1]

Sister St. Columba took advantage of her young cousin's indecision to do all that she could to induce her to enter that convent, and become an Ursuline like herself.

M. Lamyn, whose affection for his niece had increased since he had seen more of her, and learnt to know her better, added his entreaties to those of his daughter, who was backed up by the superior and the other religious of her convent. It had been enough for them only to see Margaret, in order to perceive at once what a valuable member she would be of their community.

These Ursulines were highly respected, and were regarded as one of the strictest and most fervent communities in the neighbourhood, and there seemed to be no reason why Margaret should not accede to the flattering proposals made to her. Yet, as soon as her cousin began to persuade her to join them, she answered her in words that show how deeply her soul was penetrated by the supernatural spirit, and with what purity of intention she

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 357.

was preparing for the important step that she was about to take. "Do you not see," she said, "that if I enter your convent, it will be for love of you; but I want to go to a house where I have no friends or relations, that I may be a nun for love of God."

This unexpected refusal on Margaret's part only made her friends more anxious than before to overcome her opposition, and, in hopes of giving additional weight to their arguments, they began to speak of material advantages, which would, they trusted, influence her decision, by removing the chief obstacle to her immediate entrance to a convent. Sister St. Columba offered to share with her the annual allowance made her by her family in accordance with the custom in most religious houses at that time, and also to induce the superior (whose consent was already promised) to remit the payment of a considerable amount of the usual dowry.

Margaret's resolution was not shaken by any of these proposals, but she began to examine very carefully God's designs, and to pray earnestly for light to know where, and in which Order, He wished her to dedicate herself to His service. He did not let her wait long for an answer, and she seemed to hear a voice within her saying, with reference to the Ursuline convent: "I do not want you here, but at St. Mary's."[1]

On another occasion, when she was looking at a portrait of St. Francis of Sales, the Saint appeared to cast a tender and fatherly glance upon her, and at the same time to call her his daughter, so that

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 357.

thenceforth, as she tells us, she could not help considering him to be her father.

Her mind was soon made up, and she determined to enter the Visitation Order; but no sooner did she speak of her resolution to her friends, than she became the victim of a fresh kind of persecution. Her relatives and their acquaintances, as well as the Ursulines, seemed to join in a real conspiracy to thwart her in her purpose and to force her to give up the idea of entering the Visitation Order, by representing it in a most unfavourable and ridiculous light. Languet tells us[1] that they told in her presence all sorts of stories calculated to discourage her, and laughed at the practices of this Order in a way likely to disgust a less steadfast and loyal heart.

She was so quiet and gentle in spite of these attacks, that her friends fancied her to be half-convinced, and, as she says, they were preparing to "open the door of St. Ursula to her," when Providence came to her aid in a very decisive manner.

She heard one evening that her brother was dangerously ill, and her mother at the point of death, and that both were most anxious for her to come home without delay. Although she was not well herself, having suffered much from the attacks of her friends, which were particularly painful to one of so sensitive a nature, she did not hesitate, but set out at once in the dead of the night, regarding this incident as devised by God for her deliverance. In all haste she traversed the ten leagues that lay

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

between Macon and Verosvres, but, when she arrived, all danger was over, and soon both the invalids recovered completely. Margaret did not long enjoy the happiness of seeing them thus restored to health, contrary to all expectations, for she had hardly escaped from the persecution that she had endured at Macon, at the hands of those who loved her very truly but did not understand her, when she had to encounter another persecution from people whose feelings towards her were very different. The tyrants at Lautecour again began to ill-treat her, displaying more bitterness, spite, and cruelty than ever before. She says: "I had to work with the servants as long as daylight lasted, and in the evening I seemed to have done nothing right in the eyes of the people with whom I lived. They abused me so that I did not venture to eat, and I hid myself away, wherever I could, so as to have a few minutes' peace."[1]

Margaret certainly did not spare herself. Wishing to accustom herself to the practices of the religious life, she resumed all her penances with more energy, we may almost say with more intemperance than ever. Fasts, vigils, and mortifications of every kind —she omitted nothing, so insatiable was her desire to share her Divine Master's life of suffering. "To give Him some drops of my blood," she writes, "I used to tie something round my fingers and then prick them with needles. I took the discipline every day in Lent, as much as I could, in honour of His scourging. Nevertheless, however long I

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 360.

used it, I had very little blood to offer to my dear Lord, in return for all that He shed for love of me. As I struck myself on the shoulders, it took a very long time. During the three days of the Carnival, I should have liked to tear myself to pieces, in order to make reparation for the insults that sinners were offering to His Divine Majesty. I kept these days as a fast, on bread and water, bestowing on the poor whatever food was given me." She practised such severe penances that her health was seriously affected. A violent pain, caused perhaps by a wound, made itself felt in her side; she did her best to conceal it, but one day, having accidentally fallen down, she was unable to raise herself, and an involuntary cry of pain escaped her. "O God," she groaned, "how much my side hurts me!" Her mother heard her words and began to question her and the servants, from whom Madame Alacoque learnt of the excessive austerities that she practised, for they used to hear her scourging herself to blood until far into the night, and often in the morning, on going into her room, they saw that her bed had not been occupied.

To force her to abandon these dangerous excesses, Madame Alacoque made Margaret give up her little room and come to share her apartment. The young girl obeyed and suffered in silence a mortification that cost her far more than all the tortures that she had inflicted upon herself; but soon ulcers broke out upon her legs, and she availed herself of the opportunity to beg her mother to let her have a room to herself, as it would be unpleasant for them

both to sleep together. Madame Alacoque consented at last, and Margaret made use of her liberty to resume all her penitential practices.

Some years passed in this way. In 1669, either in August or September, she was confirmed, having reached the age of twenty-two without receiving the Sacrament that imparts to us strength from on high and makes us soldiers of Christ. Such delay in the reception of Confirmation was not uncommon at a time when French Bishops were not always careful to reside in their own dioceses. The Bishop of Autun at that time was Mgr. Gabriel de Roquette, who, being also the King's almoner, lived almost always at the Court, and had not visited his flock for a long time. Margaret was confirmed by Mgr. Jean de Meaupou, Bishop of Chalon-sur-Seine, who had been asked by the Bishop of Autun to make a visitation in his diocese. It was at her confirmation that she took "Mary" as a second name.

We have just mentioned one reason, and that a sufficient one, for her late reception of that Sacrament which the Fathers call "the completion of baptism," but perhaps there is another of a different kind, and we may suppose that it pleased the Holy Ghost to wait until Margaret was about to undergo her final struggle with the world, before conferring upon her in all its fulness the gift of fortitude, that would then be more necessary to her than ever. However this may be, her last struggle was not of long duration, and her courage and fidelity were soon to be crowned with victory.

In the year following her confirmation, a uni-

versal jubilee was proclaimed by Clement X on the occasion of his elevation to the see of Peter. In order to make it easier for the faithful to gain the jubilee indulgences, members of the religious orders held missions in most parts of France, and a Franciscan came to Verosvres, who had a well-earned reputation for sanctity of life and skill in dealing with souls. He was hospitably entertained by Margaret's family, and she took advantage of his presence in the house to open her heart to him and consult him on the subject of her vocation. It was at this time that she made the general confession of which mention has already been made in the preceding chapter. Whilst preparing for it and passing in review all the years of her childhood and youth, she detected only very trivial faults, and, fancying that she did not know how to discover her offences against God, she thought her best plan would be to adopt a form of examination of conscience from some pious book. She copied it out word for word, not omitting even the more horrible sins, which she had not only never committed, but of which she had never previously had any idea, and which she hardly understood at all. Amongst them there were, as she says, some things that she was horrified even to mention, but she told herself: "Perhaps I have committed them; I do not know what this sin is, nor do I remember it, but it is quite right that I should endure the shame of confessing it, in order to satisfy the justice of God."[1]

She went into the confessional, taking with her a

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 361.

voluminous manuscript, but scarcely had she begun to read it, when this wise confessor, perceiving the sort of soul with which he had to deal, stopped her and told her to put aside all that she had written. He then helped her to make her confession, which, as she says, left her in great peace. This peace, accompanied as it was, by a vivid, supernatural light, did not proceed only from her consciousness of being in God's grace, but also from the fact that this wise and pious confessor had made her believe more firmly in her vocation, and had encouraged her to hope that the obstacles still in her way would soon be removed.

When the good Franciscan found out what was preventing her from following her vocation, he went to see Chrysostom and reproached him for his conduct towards a sister whom he really loved and whose happiness he desired. Chrysostom saw that he had done wrong, and determined to raise Margaret's dowry at once, promising to take her himself, without any further delay, to whichever convent she should choose.

At the same time he wished, before taking any steps in the matter, to be sure that his sister still persisted in her desire to be a nun. He questioned her accordingly, and she told him that she would rather die than change her mind.

One last effort was made to induce her to give up all thoughts of the Visitation Order, towards which she was so much attracted, and against which all the antipathy of her family seemed to be excited, we do not know for what reason. Forgetful,

at least to some extent, of the promise that he had just made, Chrysostom went to Macon, without his sister's knowledge, and discussed with the superior of the Ursulines the question of Margaret's dowry and her entrance into that house. On his return to Lautecour, he announced that everything was settled and that they were expecting her at St. Ursula's.

Margaret showed herself as determined and fearless as she had previously been undecided and timid, being helped, as she says, by Our Lady, whom she "invoked as her good Mistress, through the intervention of St. Hyacinth." The Blessed Virgin reassured her during her meditation, and said: "Fear nothing, thou shalt indeed be my daughter, and I shall always be thy good Mother." Consequently Margaret replied at once to her brother's announcement: "That plan will never be ratified." Then, remembering what she had said to her cousin, Sister St. Columba, she added: "I want to join the Holy Maries, in some distant convent, where I have neither relations nor friends, for I desire to be a religious solely for love of God. I want to leave the world altogether, and hide myself in some little corner, so as to forget it and be forgotten by it, and see it no more."

Her relatives at last gave up opposing a resolution that they saw would never change, and began to ask her whither she intended to go, and which convent she had chosen, but Margaret had no particular one in view. They mentioned all the houses of the Visitation Order in the country, but

the first names left her silent and apparently indifferent, for they neither attracted nor repelled her; scarcely, however, had she heard the name of Paray than her heart was filled with joy, and she exclaimed that it was needless to propose any other places, since it was at Paray that she would end her life.

Chrysostom then consented to escort her thither to see the house and the nuns, but only on condition that, at this first visit, there should be no discussion of her vocation, and no request for admission to the noviciate.

Hardly had she entered the parlour, when she heard a voice within her saying: "It is here that I would have thee be," and, forgetting all her brother's conditions, she told him that everything must be settled at once, and that they must agree to whatever the superior wished. She consented to return to Verosvres only when all was arranged and the day fixed for her entrance as postulant.[1]

She went back to her mother for a few weeks, and attended to all necessary business, and made her will. Those who saw her during the interval between her first visit to Paray and her departure for the convent hardly knew her; she was so full of joy that it betrayed itself in her appearance and in all her actions. "I seemed," she says, "to have entered upon a new life . . . which made me so happy that those who did not know what was going on within me, used to say: 'Look at her! she has none of the ways of a religious.' In fact, I showed

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 363.

more vanity in my dress than I had ever done before, and I was very gay, so great was the joy that I felt in knowing that I belonged wholly to my Sovereign Good."

Having disposed of all her property and made all final arrangements, on June 20, 1671, she left the house where she had been born, and where she had spent almost all her childhood and youth. She alone appeared unmoved, although all her relations were in tears. Languet tells us,[1] almost in Margaret's own words, that she, who on other occasions had been so ready to show emotion, was then like one of the great trees, which, having deep roots, stand firm even when assailed by winds and storms. With a calm and joyous expression, she embraced some and comforted others, striving to make all realize that her courage and composure were due entirely to God's grace. She started at length, feeling like a prisoner escaping from bondage, to enter the home of her Spouse, to enjoy His presence, to share His riches and glory, and to give herself up freely to His love.

Thus she arrived at Paray, "the place of her happiness," never to leave it again; but at the moment when she crossed the threshold of the convent, nature suddenly reawakened within her. It was not the first time that the fact of entering a convent had produced a revulsion of feeling. In the preceding century, on November 2, 1533, very early in the morning, two young people, brother and sister, secretly left a large house at Avila in

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

Old Castile. One was St. Teresa, who, unknown to her father, was going under the escort of Antony de Ahumada, to dedicate herself to God in the Convent of the Incarnation. Just as she was leaving the house where she had been born and had grown up, surrounded by every care and luxury, her heart began to fail. She described her feelings thirty years later, when writing her life, and said that the remembrance was still fresh in her memory. "At the moment of crossing the threshold of my father's house," she wrote, "I felt such agony that I shall not suffer more, I think, at the hour of my death. My bones seemed to be separating from one another."

Margaret Mary, for so we must call her henceforth, felt the same agony, not when leaving Lautecour, but on her arrival at the Visitation Convent at Paray. In her autobiography is a passage that may be compared with that just quoted from St. Teresa. "I confess that at the moment when I had to enter the convent, all the pains that I had ever experienced, and others in addition, assailed me so violently that my soul seemed about to quit my body." This agony lasted only for a moment, though it was a terrible moment. God seemed to have accumulated and intensified all the pain, anguish and struggles that Margaret had suffered for nearly fifteen years, in order to add to the merit and heroism of her sacrifice, and to make it one of the most perfect models to set before those who desire to devote themselves to God's service in the religious life.

CHAPTER III

NOVICIATE

AS soon as Margaret Mary was admitted within the enclosure of the convent at Paray, the violent temptation that had assailed her on the threshold vanished as if by magic. Her trouble of mind, fear and anguish were suddenly replaced by a profound peace, accompanied by rapturous happiness. Everything at Paray delighted her; the sisters, the way of life, even the walls of the gloomy building, which seemed to her to tell her, in their own way, that she had not mistaken the road, but had reached the place destined for her by God. Wherever she went she said: "It is here that God wishes me to be," and as she uttered these words, she experienced pleasure as intense as it is possible for a faithful soul to feel here below. On other occasions, in order better to express her joy, she had recourse to the Biblical comparisons that occur frequently in her writings, and were already so familiar to her, that, young as she was, she knew how to make a wonderful use of them. Recalling Esther and Judith, she said with no less elegance than force, that the Lord had taken away the sackcloth of her captivity and put on her garments of joy.[1]

[1] There is a reference here to the sackcloth in which Mardochai clothed himself in token of mourning for the

In the Visitation Convent at Paray, Margaret Mary found complete satisfaction of all her desires and needs. From her earliest childhood she had ardently longed to be a saint, and the life that she was to lead thenceforth supplied her with the best means to become one, and with examples of sanctity. She was in the midst of St. Francis of Sales' spiritual daughters, then commonly called the "Holy Maries." She believed that all who bore this name ought to be saints, and that therefore she too must be one, cost what it might.[1]

Of all the houses belonging to this religious Order, so noted for its sanctity, the convent whither Providence had manifestly guided her steps was especially remarkable for regularity and fervour. It had existed about forty-five years, the first Mass having been said on September 4, 1626, and had never ceased to be regarded as a model. It was known as "dear Paray," and the "Thabor of superiors," for the sisters were so thoroughly united and so filled with the spirit of obedience that the task of ruling them was both easy and pleasant.

When Margaret Mary entered, the community was most edifying, and comprised many excellent religious, amongst whom there were two particularly conspicuous by reason of their great virtue and their unusual qualities of mind and intellect. These

---

captivity and persecution of the Jews (*Esther* iv, 1), and also to Judith's putting off the garments of widowhood and substituting those of joy, in order to fulfil her mission (*Judith* xvi, 9).

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 364.

were the superior, Mother Margaret Jerome Hersant, and the novice mistress, Sister Anne Frances Thouvant. The former had come from the convent of St. Antony in Paris, where she had been professed, and had been instructed by St. Jane Frances de Chantal, her spiritual director being St. Vincent de Paul. Her contemporaries say of her that she was "a seraphic soul, with great wisdom in the guidance of others." The various houses of the Order were all anxious to have her as superior, and wherever she went she was spoken of as a saint. The sight of so worthy a daughter of St. Francis of Sales could not fail to make a deep impression upon Margaret Mary; but when the latter entered the convent at Paray, Mother Hersant had been superior there for nearly six years, and at the end of that period she quitted the house and never returned. Sister Thouvant's influence upon her was no doubt greater and was exercised for a longer time. This venerable religious had been professed at Paray forty-four years previously. She had been the first to take the holy habit in that house, and had been elected superior four times. As a young nun she had attracted St. Jane de Chantal's notice, whenever this holy foundress visited Paray, and the virtues that she practised during her long life were a proof of the acumen displayed by the saint in the discernment of spirits.[1]

Not only did Margaret Mary's superiors exert a most sanctifying influence upon her, but her idea of religious perfection was heightened by the sight

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 414

of the goodness and piety of her three companions in the noviciate and of the thirty-three professed members of the community at Paray, many of whom died in the odour of sanctity.

She found much to admire and imitate in the conduct of those about her; but, from the day of her arrival, she attracted the attention of both her superiors and her companions, who summed up their opinion of the new postulant by saying, with Mother Hersant, that she was one of a thousand, for they were astonished to see one who had just left the world, and had not yet put on the religious habit, so recollected in God,[1] with ways of thought and of external behaviour such as they believed could be the result only of a long residence in a religious house.

We have been careful to record here the first impressions produced by St. Margaret Mary upon the inmates of the convent at Paray, for we shall have to refer to them later on, when speaking of the trials and opposition that she encountered. We must be on our guard against the exaggerated statements of some of her biographers, who would have us suppose that she was misunderstood by her sisters in religion and treated unjustly by them at first.

On the contrary, they knew how to appreciate her merits and virtues from the moment of her arrival, but the spirit of humility and simplicity, that characterizes the Visitation Order led them to

[1] Deposition of Sister Mary Catherine, Carmelite of Chailloux, made in 1715, *ap.* Hamon, *op. cit*, p. 77.

distrust the unusual paths along which God was pleased to guide her steps, having special designs upon her. There was no hostility, and still less was there any jealousy, apart from a few sad exceptions to which we shall refer in due course; but there was some timidity, ascribable, perhaps, to too strict an adherence to the customs of the Order, and therefore there was a tendency to condemn whatever in their sister's behaviour or character seemed to be at variance with these customs, and they criticized especially her sublime gift of meditation, which soon revealed itself, and which plainly did not agree with the method in use among the community.[1]

St. Margaret Mary had long taken great delight in mental prayer, although she was fully convinced that she knew nothing about it. Wishing to perform this exercise as well as possible, since it was now no longer a simple matter of devotion, but a duty imposed upon her by her entrance into religion, she went to the novice mistress and asked humbly how she ought to proceed in order to make a good meditation. The venerable novice mistress could hardly conceal her surprise at this request, for, although Margaret Mary had been only a short time in the house, these few days had sufficed to enable Sister Thouvant, a nun of great experience, to understand this privileged soul and to perceive the favours which Our Lord had already bestowed

[1] On this subject see the very just remarks made by Father Daniel in his introduction to Croiset's *Abrégé de la Vie de la Sœur Marguerite-Marie*, p. xvii.

upon it. She was at a loss how to answer, until she remembered very opportunely a touching event that had occurred soon after the establishment of the convent. The sisters often spoke of it with edification, recalling how, in 1628, one of the first six nuns fell dangerously ill, and in the midst of terrible suffering she exclaimed one day: "O gentle hand of Jesus, draw upon me whatever Thou wilt."

The superior asked her what she meant, and the heroic patient replied: "My dearest mother, I am standing before God like a canvas before a painter. God is the artist, and I am imploring Him to trace upon me a perfect likeness of Jesus crucified."

Sister Thouvant adopted this beautiful idea, and simply said to the young postulant: "Go and put yourself before Our Lord, like a canvas before an artist."

"I should have liked her to explain her meaning to me," remarks Margaret Mary, "for I did not understand it; I did not, however, venture to tell her so, and then a voice said to me: 'Come, I will teach you.' When next I went to meditation, my Divine Master showed me that my soul was the canvas upon which He desired to trace all the features of His life spent in love and privation, in silence and sacrifice, even to the end; and that He would reproduce them upon my soul after it had been purified from all the stains that still disfigured it, and from all affection for earthly things and love of myself and of creatures, to which I was naturally much inclined."[1]

St. Margaret Mary was strongly attracted to

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 365.

the practice of mental prayer, but she was no less drawn to inflict upon herself the most severe penances, and before she entered the convent she disregarded the laws of prudence, and cared nothing for the limitations of her strength and the preservation of her health. At Paray she was fortunately restrained by obedience; we know what value she set upon this virtue, and after her admission to the convent she resolved to be more zealous than ever in practising it. She kept nothing back when speaking to "her good mistress," as she called Sister Thouvant, and did nothing without her consent. "I used to regard her, and my superior also," she says, "as my Christ upon earth."

Once, however, impelled by her insatiable desire to suffer, she planned to make use of a little diplomacy, in order to win from her mistress certain concessions, and to be allowed somewhat more liberty with regard to austerities. "I meant," she says, "to make her permission as to penances extend further than she intended; but as soon as I set about it, our holy Founder reproached me sternly, and forbade me to go on, so that I never ventured to revert to the matter. His words have always remained graven on my heart: 'What, my child, dost thou think to please God by going beyond the limits of obedience, which is the chief foundation and support of this congregation, far more than any austerities?'"[1]

When two months and a few days had passed since Margaret Mary's arrival at Paray, she had

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II. p. 366.

completed the usual period of probation, and the professed sisters unanimously declared her worthy to begin her real noviciate and to receive the habit of the Order.

The ceremony of clothing took place on the feast of St. Louis, August 25, 1671. Her mother, her brother Chrysostom, and her uncle, the parish priest of Verosvres, were all present, and added their signatures to the document in which she declared that it was of her own accord, and without any constraint, that she took the step which marked her real introduction to the religious life.

When she received the habit, she celebrated her espousal to the Divine Bridegroom, to whom she longed to bind herself for ever by irrevocable vows. As a pledge of the new bond uniting her to Himself, Our Lord, who had always lavished upon her tokens of His love and favour, now began to overwhelm her with them to such an extent that she was often, as she says, "beside herself."

At first her deep sense of her own unworthiness, which increased with her sanctity, caused her to be strangely confused, when she contemplated the favours bestowed upon her by her Divine Master.

Moreover, she was afraid of betraying outwardly what was going on in her soul. She already possessed sufficient insight into the spirit of the Visitation Order to understand that simple piety and goodness were requisite, that anything which could make a sister conspicuous was viewed with distrust, that perfection did not consist in raptures and ecstasies, but that, to borrow Père de Ravignan's

words, a Visitation nun ought not "to be extraordinary except by being ordinary."

The poor child did her best, but she could no more conceal than hinder God's favours. Some surprise began to be felt in the community, and they watched, with curiosity mingled with alarm, this strange little novice with her absorbed air, her eyes fixed on space and her eager expression, which sometimes betrayed visibly the fire burning within her soul.

It is not difficult to imagine Margaret Mary's anxiety lest she should be considered unsuitable for the Visitation Order. She was forced to be afraid of graces which she would otherwise have welcomed with joy, and in this difficulty she turned to her beloved Spouse, beseeching Him humbly and tenderly to cease treating her thus, lest her vocation should be endangered.

Nevertheless she realized the value of these graces, and understood that they called for a generous return on her part, and so she strove to overcome herself more thoroughly than ever for God's sake, and to testify to Him her love and gratitude by means of her sacrifices. Amongst the sacrifices that she made with this intention are two which deserve mention here. One may seem at first sight very commonplace, but we must remember, as she did, that little things done for love of God are very precious in His sight. She had always had an overpowering dislike of every kind of cheese, and had apparently inherited this aversion, for this kind of food was absolutely banished from her home,

and when her brother Chrysostom took her to the convent, he begged the superior not to force Margaret to eat it. The matter being regarded as of trifling importance, his request was granted at once without demur, and the superior promised never to give cheese to the young postulant. It happened, however, one day, at the time which we are considering, that the sister serving in the refectory offered some cheese to Margaret Mary, who regarded the mistake as a sign of her superiors' wishes, and perhaps even of Our Lord's will. Consequently she took what was offered her, being resolved to overcome the repugnance that she felt more strongly than ever. In spite of all her efforts, however, she could not succeed in doing so, and was obliged to leave the cheese untouched. The mistress of novices had watched the whole episode, and after dinner she took Margaret Mary aside, blamed her for her weakness, and urged her next time to show more courage in overcoming herself, and to offer this sacrifice generously to Our Lord, who apparently required it of her. Not long afterwards cheese was offered her again, not accidentally this time, but by Sister Thouvant's orders. Margaret Mary was determined to obey and to gain the victory; she summoned up all her courage and did her best to eat the food that was so abhorrent to her, but once more she failed and had to surrender. On leaving the refectory Sister Thouvant found fault with her again, more sharply than before, and ended by saying: "Very well, you are not worthy to practise this mortification, and now I forbid you to

do what I ordered before." The poor novice withdrew in tears, much discouraged, but soon her will reasserted itself, and telling herself that she must either die or overcome, she went and knelt down before the Blessed Sacrament, where she remained for three or four hours, weeping and praying for strength to conquer her repugnance. "O God," she cried, "hast Thou forsaken me? must there still be something wanting to my sacrifice? may it not be a perfect holocaust?" "But," she continues, "my Lord, wishing to test to the utmost the fidelity of my love (as He has since revealed to me), took pleasure in watching the conflict in His unworthy slave between Divine love and natural repugnance."[1]

He left her for three whole days in a state of internal struggle, which tortured her soul and weakened her body. At length, in the evening of the third day, she heard our Lord's voice saying: "There must be nothing withheld from love," and He bade her try again, promising that in the end she would triumph.

She went, therefore, to her mistress, knelt at her feet, and implored her with tears to recall her prohibition, and finally obtained leave to try once more to do as she was told. This time Divine love was stronger than all the revolt of nature, and the sacrifice was complete, but it had cost her great suffering and grief. She lets us see this herself when she says that never had she felt such a loathing, and her contemporaries enable us to

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 369.

understand it still better, for they add that she did herself such violence as to arouse the pity of all. She was not, however, contented with having won one victory, but, wishing her triumph to be complete, she insisted upon renewing the trial every time that cheese was served to the community, overcoming always with the same courage an aversion that never diminished, and suffering such tortures that on leaving the refectory she was quite exhausted and remained in a state of prostration all the rest of the day. This continued frequently for eight successive years, until at last her superiors, being justly anxious about her health, forbade her to inflict such suffering upon herself in future.

The second sacrifice, by means of which Margaret Mary tried to prove her gratitude to her Divine Spouse, cost her yet more. There was at Paray a young nun, endowed with the most attractive qualities, and remarkable for her piety, frankness and goodness. Her character possessed so many points in common with that of Margaret Mary that the two young religious were inevitably attracted towards one another, and Margaret Mary soon conceived for the other sister an affection, that was perfectly pure, but too lively and perhaps too natural. Our Lord reproached her severely more than once, speaking more emphatically each time and telling her that He intended to be the absolute Master of her heart, not sharing it with another. Finally, He said that if she did not withdraw from creatures, He would withdraw from her. She wept and lamented, made the most heroic resolutions, but

could not altogether free herself from her fetters. It took only three days to overcome the physical repugnance of which we have spoken, but three months were required before she could conquer this attachment, although she had every reason to believe it to be innocent. At last, after many efforts and prayers, there came a moment when she could declare that her love for her Divine Master was without any reservation or alloy, and say with perfect truth: "From that time I felt so detached from creatures that their friendship was a matter of indifference to me."[1]

Our Lord, not wishing to be outdone in generosity by His spouse, began thenceforth to lavish upon her more favours and consolations than ever before; but in this way He exposed her to fresh trials and difficulties. So great was at times the flood of graces poured out upon her, that she could not refrain in her bewilderment from exclaiming: "O God, either check this torrent that is overwhelming me, or increase my capacity to endure it."[2]

What troubled her most was her fear lest those around her should notice that her Divine Master, whilst treating her as a favourite child, was leading her along paths diverging more and more from those trodden by her companions. Her noviciate was drawing to a close, and nearly a year had passed since her clothing. Would she be admitted to profession? All were agreed as to her goodness

[1] These words are quoted by A. Hamon, from Roanne's MS., *op. cit.*, p. 87 *et seq.*

[2] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 369.

and piety, from the youngest sisters who, immediately after her clothing, had begun to praise her great zeal in serving God with all her might in her new condition, to the venerable elders and her superiors, such as Mother Hersant and Mother Thouvant, who about the same time had foretold that one day she would be a saint.[1]

There was but one opinion regarding her goodness, but would she be the sort of saint that the Visitation Order aimed at producing? The two venerable religious, who canonized her, so to say, in advance, in the words just quoted, had often told her, when she confided to them her extraordinary experiences, that "that was not the spirit of the daughters of Holy Mary, and if she did not give up all that sort of thing she would not be received." As a matter of fact, August 25, 1672, passed without the question of her profession being raised.

It is easy to imagine the sorrow and tears that she poured forth to her Divine Master. "Alas! Lord," she cried, "Thou wilt be the cause of my being sent away." The answer was not long in coming: "Tell thy superior," replied our Saviour, "that she need not fear to receive thee, for I will be answerable for thee, and if she thinks Me solvent, I will be thy surety."

The superior to whom Our Lord sent this timid and humble novice was not Mother Hersant, for she had completed her six years' tenure of the office of superior, and had left Paray immediately after Ascension Day, in this same year, 1672. At the

[1] Hamon, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

request of the Paray community, the convent at Dijon had sent to replace her one of its best subjects, Mother Mary Frances de Saumaise. She had been born at Dijon in 1620, so she was fifty-two years of age when she came to Paray as Mother Hersant's successor, and was still vigorous in her maturity. From her tenth year she had been a boarder at the Visitation Convent in her native town,[1] when fifteen she had exchanged the dress of a boarder for a novice's habit, and in the following year she had taken the vows. Consequently she had been so little in the world that it had never set its mark upon her, and from her earliest years she had been in the convent. Nevertheless she possessed certain characteristics, which she must have inherited from her parents, and which seemed to fit her particularly well for a cloistered life, and were by no means antagonistic to it. She belonged to an old parliamentary family, and had inherited the sturdy common sense and ready wit of the old Burgundian magistrates, who could not but appreciate the spirit of the Visitation Order that displays so much judicious sweetness and moderation. It had been quite easy for Mother Mary Frances to assimilate this spirit and to become a perfect religious, according to the ideas of St. Francis of Sales and St. Jane de Chantal.

[1] Quite young children used to be admitted to these convents in order that any germ of a religious vocation in them might be cultivated. There were fourteen such children at Paray, dressed in a little religious habit. *Cf. Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie Alacoque*, publiée par le Monastère de Paray-le-Monial. Paris: Gigord, ed. 1909, p. 87 note 2.

In a record published recently by the Paray nuns we find the following passage: "During her last visit to Dijon, our holy Foundress, noticing this young religious, desired to speak to her alone, and she discovered in her wisdom and ripe judgement far in advance of her age, so that she foretold that she would eventually be one of the best superiors in the Order,"[1]

Sister de Saumaise possessed true and fervent piety, as well as great intellectual powers, and Providence seemed to have provided for the cultivation and development of the mystical side of her nature by placing her under the guidance of an admirable superior, Mother Anne Seraphine Boulier, whom we shall have occasion to mention again, since she influenced Margaret Mary's life, and had also to some extent had the same extraordinary experiences, preceding her along the rough path of trials and contradictions. Intercourse with Mother Anne Seraphine enabled Mother de Saumaise to understand Margaret Mary, and to guide and assist her amidst the difficulties of her great task. When the latter was commissioned to give Our Lord's message to her new superior, she must have felt divided between hope and fear. Following her natural good sense and the traditions of the Order, and being guided also by the feeling that prevailed in the community at the moment when she assumed the reins of government, Mother de Saumaise had at first shown herself disposed to treat Margaret Mary with some amount of severity

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 441.

and distrust. The young novice, however, perceived at once that her superior was inspired by the purest love of God, besides being experienced in all spiritual matters, and very swift to discern the various ways in which Our Lord deals with the souls that He has particularly chosen as His own.

Summoning up, therefore, all her courage, Margaret Mary went to her, and, in a humble but decided manner, repeated to her the very words that her Divine Master had used. Mother de Saumaise listened without betraying either surprise or emotion, then, as Margaret Mary herself says: "She ordered me to ask Our Lord, in token of good faith, to make me useful to the Order by the exact observance of all its rules." Without delay, the novice went to consult her Divine Counsellor, who replied: "Very well, My child, I grant all that you ask, for I will make you more useful to the Order than anyone expects, but in a way known as yet only to Myself. Henceforth I will adapt My graces to the spirit of your rule, the will of your superiors, and your own weakness, so that you may view with suspicion whatever would hinder you in the exact observance of your rule, which I desire you to set above everything else. Moreover, I am content that you should prefer the will of your superiors to My own, when they forbid you to do what I have ordered. Let them do as they like with you; I know how to secure the success of My plans, even by means that appear opposed and contrary to them. I reserve to Myself only the guidance of your mind, and particularly of your heart, in which I have

established the dominion of My love, and I shall never abandon it to others."[1]

Mother de Saumaise certainly understood no better than Margaret Mary herself how God could render this young novice so useful to the community, nor did she know what means He intended to use in order to overcome the obstacles in the way of the accomplishment of His designs. She was, however, satisfied, and from this moment a change took place in her attitude towards Margaret Mary and in her appreciation of her. The esteem and sympathy that she had always felt for her became more marked, and revealed themselves in her words and actions. It is easy to account for this change. The counsels which Margaret Mary ascribed to her Divine Master agreed so well with her superior's ideal of the religious life and with the spirit of the Visitation Order, that she had no difficulty in regarding them as authentic. When she reviewed Margaret Mary's actions, words, and feelings, she found it impossible to believe her to be in a state of error and blindness, or the victim of illusions suggested by her own imagination or by the wiles of the devil.

She could not for a moment be suspected of pride or obstinacy, still less of falsehood or hypocrisy, so great were her simplicity and frankness in speaking to her superiors, her readiness to obey their wishes, no matter what violence she inflicted upon herself and her own inclinations, and the unfailing patience with which she accepted every contradiction and criticism.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 370.

She was gentle, obedient, simple, and frank because she was profoundly humble. The highest authorities on asceticism agree in regarding humility as the chief and most unmistakable of all marks by which we may recognize the truth of visions and ecstasies, and God's extraordinary supernatural action in a holy soul. Of course, such humility must be genuine and lasting, the sort of humility described so well by Languet as "that of a soul which is not puffed up by God's favours, but far from boasting of them or seeking them, fears and avoids them, conceals them as far as possible, and reveals them only under obedience and through distrust of self, doing so with simplicity when ordered, and being always ready to prefer obedience to these favours. . . . Humility of this kind," adds the pious Bishop, "is not only a trustworthy mark of the truth of revelations, but it is so good an evidence of it as to be sufficient, even if no other can be adduced."[1]

Margaret Mary's humility was of this description; it was this virtue that made her so gentle and patient when her superiors and companions, viewing with suspicion the exceptional graces that she received, found fault with her, or laughed at her in a manner calculated to wound her deeply. This was remembered many years after she had ended her life. In 1715 Mgr. d'Allencourt, Bishop of Autun, caused an episcopal investigation to be made into her life and the facts connected with it,

[1] Languet: *Vie de Vénérable Mère Marguerite-Marie*, Introduction, p. xxviii.

and many of the religious at Paray, who had lived with her and known her personally, were called upon to give evidence. We may quote the testimony of two who had been at Paray when Margaret Mary entered the convent. Sister Jane Mary Contois was seventy-seven years of age in 1715, and she declared that the venerable Sister Alacoque edified the whole community, especially "by her charity to her sisters, to whom she never said a word that could vex them, and also by her patience in submitting to the sharp reproofs, scorn, and ridicule that she often had to endure." Sister Margaret d'Athose was sixty-four in 1715, and she said that from the time of her entrance into the convent, Margaret Mary set an example both to herself and to others, of courtesy and good manners, being always eager to please her sisters; she did not pay particular attention to those who were her friends, but took peculiar delight in serving those who appeared hostile to her and caused her most mortifications. This happened frequently, and she endured everything with great patience and interior joy, which led her to say several times to the witness: "Thank God for the grace that He has given me to-day." The witness answered: "You mean apparently that you have had something to suffer," and she replied with a smile: "That is true," but she never said anything more.[1]

To these two testimonies we may add a third, supplied not by one of Margaret Mary's sisters in religion, but by one of her old pupils, Sister Mary

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, pp. 359, 361.

Chevalier de Montroüan de Saint-Etienne, an Ursuline nun. She was invited to state before Mgr. d'Allencourt's tribunal what she knew of her whom she had been happy enough to have as her teacher for more than a year at Paray. According to the official report, she declared that she had seen how the servant of God suffered contempt, and mocking and even insulting words with wonderful patience and humility, so that the witness once ventured to say to her: "Dear Mother, you are very good to put up with all this; you must be a saint." In reply, Margaret Mary said very gently: "My dear child, let us go and visit the Blessed Sacrament, and you must ask pardon, and at the same time pray for her who is giving me an opportunity to suffer something for Jesus Christ."[1]

It was her deep and true humility that made her so ready to yield to the will of her superiors, and this submission was the more meritorious on her part, because their desires were generally opposed to her own tastes. It was her delight to give herself up to contemplation, but, fearing lest she should injure herself by unprofitable and foolish dreaming, her superiors tried to stop her by assigning to her tasks very incompatible with inward recollection. She was not even allowed to take part in all the devotional exercises prescribed by the rule. When in the morning the community assembled in chapel for the ordinary meditation, Margaret Mary was present only whilst the points for meditation were read out; as soon as this was

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 522.

over she had to leave the choir, and while the other sisters were praying, she spent the time in manual work, sweeping the corridors and cells, or watering and weeding the garden. It was not by way of making a concession to her piety that her superiors let her come to the choir to hear the subject of the morning's meditation, but it was in order to impose upon her additional mortification. They intended her to busy her mind exclusively with this subject, whilst she made her meditation, as best she could, in the garden or during her house-work. They wished her to practise the kind of mental prayer which is the first, simplest, and most elementary of all, and consequently suited to beginners, and St. Francis of Sales used to recommend it to his daughters of the Visitation Order, and especially to the novices. In accordance with the rules laid down for her guidance, the mistress of novices was bound to require them to make "the meditations in Philothea"—*i.e.*, in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, into which book the saint had inserted them that they might be accessible to all, to people in the world as well as to religious. This lowly method of meditation has been followed by many great saints throughout their whole life; they have never abandoned it, and by means of it have attained to the highest perfection. But there have been others, on the contrary, who could not adhere to it, but have followed other paths, being guided and upheld by the hand of God, and they have discovered on these supernatural and exceptional ways, lights and

consolations that they have been incapable of expressing in words. St. Margaret Mary was one of these.

In a noted passage, where she describes one intending to practise mental prayer as a man undertaking to cultivate a barren soil, overgrown with brambles, so as to make of it a garden for the Lord, St. Teresa has depicted in glowing colours all the varieties of mental prayer, from the first and lowest, which is this simple meditation of which we have just been speaking, in which, as the Saint says, "the gardener draws water from the well by the strength of his arms, which is very hard work," to the highest degree of mystical contemplation, in which the garden receives rain falling abundantly from heaven, as God then takes upon Himself the task of watering it, with no effort or exertion on our part.[1]

St. Margaret Mary had been raised by God to this degree of contemplation, although she was quite young and so completely unaware of it that she honestly believed herself to be totally ignorant of the great art of meditation, the object of her most ardent desires. In order to enter into communication with Our Lord, she did not usually open

[1] *Vie de Sainte Thérèse, écrite par elle-même*, ch. xi. The same metaphor is used with reference to the same subject by St. Francis of Sales, who says of mental prayer that it is the water of blessing, which, being poured out, causes the plants of our good desires to put forth leaves and flowers, cleanses our souls from their imperfections, and frees our hearts from their passions (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, part ii, ch. i).

a book, nor did she fix her mind upon any particular text or definite subject, still less upon points thought out and carefully prepared beforehand. The utmost that she did was to start with some simple words, such as: "It is enough for me, O my Beloved, to be what Thou desirest," or "How beautiful is the Beloved of my soul! why can I not love Him?"—a question, as someone has remarked, that might make the angels smile, since her soul vied with them in love of Our Lord.[1]

As a rule, however, she only put herself into the presence of her Divine Spouse, and then remained at His feet, unable to fix her mind on any particular subject, and, as her contemporaries tell us, in a state of such absolute impotence, that she felt her heart, as it were, overwhelmed by the presence of God, with no emotion or affection but love, and a great longing to suffer something for love of Him.[2]

From the day when she was told to change her method, Margaret Mary did her best to conform with the instructions given her. Scarcely had she left the choir of the chapel, after hearing the points of meditation read aloud, than she tried to recall them and make them the subject of her reflections. But, as she tells us, nothing remained in her mind, everything vanished, and she could neither learn nor remember anything but what her Divine Master was teaching her.[3]

"No matter how much I tried to follow the

[1] *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie Alacoque*, publiée par le Monastère de Paray, p. 31.

[2] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 65.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, p. 373.

method taught me, I invariably had to return to my Divine Master's way, although I did my best to give it up." A kind of conflict went on in her soul, for, as she says, she struggled against Our Lord as much as she could, and this inevitably caused her great suffering. Nevertheless her adorable Spouse filled her with sweetness and consolation in spite of herself, so that she could not refrain from feeling at the same time extreme happiness, which suggested to her some of those little verses, remarkable for their simplicity and fervour, in which she delighted to express the pious emotions of her heart.

She used afterwards to go to her superiors to tell them how she had made her meditation, or rather, as she says, how her Divine Master had made it in and for her. She concealed nothing from them, neither her inability to obey them better—which caused her real sorrow—nor the incomparable graces which Our Lord continued to lavish upon her, which she could not help appreciating at their true value. She would never allow herself any reticence, for her humility, as well as her innate frankness and honesty, forced her to put herself wholly into the hands of those whose duty it was to guide her, in order that, knowing all the circumstances, they might give her the advice that she needed, and the rebukes that she believed herself to deserve.

As we have said, her humility betrayed itself in the childlike and absolute simplicity with which she spoke to her superior and the novice mistress, keeping nothing back, although, as she says, she

often did not understand what she was telling them. We have one very striking instance of this blind and complete submission due to her profound humility. It seems to have been during her noviciate that Our Lord said to her one day: "I am seeking a victim for My Heart, who will be willing to sacrifice herself as an offering for the fulfilment of My designs." Did these words convey to her any idea of the sublime and perilous mission with which she was to be entrusted in the future? We cannot tell; all that we know is that, filled with the sense of her own worthlessness, she declined the honour offered her, protesting that she did not deserve to be chosen for so glorious a task, and that many others were far more worthy of being chosen by Our Lord. But her Master insisted, and, speaking with authority, said: "I desire no one but you, and it is My will that you should yield to My wishes." Then, remembering that she was not her own mistress, and that Our Lord Himself had ordered her to set the commands of her superiors before even His own behests, she said timidly that she could do nothing without first obtaining their consent. He permitted her to ask them for it, but at the same time He enlightened Mother de Saumaise, revealing to her what her decision ought to be, and what answer she ought to give. Accordingly, after listening quietly to her dear novice's request, the good superior sent her back to tell Our Lord that she would do what He desired.[1]

[1] *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 36. *Cf.* Hamon, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

It was impossible for her any longer to question the fact that God was leading Margaret Mary along unwonted paths, and in her case humility, that touchstone which never deceives, that infallible criterion which, in the opinion of masters of the spiritual life, can guide us unerringly in the discernment of spirits,[1] was visibly impressed upon all her words, thoughts, and actions. She was so gentle and patient, so docile, obedient, and frank, that her superiors could read her soul like a book always open before them.

Thus the sudden change in the feelings and behaviour of Mother de Saumaise towards Margaret Mary remained constant, and it almost seems as if she began to regret having postponed the profession of so good a novice. At any rate, she determined to use every precaution before committing herself to any line of action, so she took counsel of Mother Boulier, her former superior at Dijon, who had always been her chief adviser. We may well believe Mother Boulier to have noticed in Mother de Saumaise's account of Margaret Mary a resemblance to herself, and she replied without hesitation that the young novice was certainly under God's guidance, that there was no doubt as to her vocation, and that they might admit her to profession without any scruple.

Accepting with joy a decision that coincided so completely with her own opinion, Mother de Saumaise had no difficulty in inducing Mother

[1] *Cf.* St. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, "On the discernment of spirits," ninth rule.

Thouvant to adopt the same view, especially as she was already inclined to take this course. The agreement of these two religious, so highly honoured and holding such influential positions in the convent, could not fail to impress the sisters when they were called upon to decide this important matter. We know that they abandoned once for all their previous opposition, and only two months after the vote which had imposed upon Margaret Mary so mortifying and painful a delay, they reversed it, and carried another which must have been to quite a contrary effect, as her contemporaries simply state, in words rendered eloquent by their brevity: "Being so well disposed, she was admitted to her holy profession by the votes of all the community."

The ceremony was fixed for Sunday, November 6, 1672.

CHAPTER IV

PROFESSION

IN order to prepare for her profession, Margaret Mary went into retreat on October 27, purposing to remain in solitude for ten days. The beginning of it was marked by an incident, trivial in itself, but perhaps for that very reason more significant as showing how thoroughly the spirit of obedience dominated her soul and motived her conduct. Mother de Saumaise, being in delicate health, had been ordered to drink asses' milk, and consequently a she-ass and her foal were kept in the convent grounds, in a part of the enclosure near the kitchen garden, where there was no fence to separate them. It is easy to imagine the mischief that these animals might have done if they had made their way into the garden, and instead of having them tethered, the nuns gave instructions to the novices to watch them and protect the vegetables from their incursions. The order was given to the whole noviciate, but Margaret Mary took it to apply to herself alone, thinking that this was a new device on the part of her superiors to try her virtue, and to distract her from what they called her day-dreams. Accordingly, from morning till night, except for the time when she was in choir,

she remained on guard, watching the animals which, as she says, gave her plenty of exercise, for they did nothing but run about. She adds: "I had no rest until the evening Angelus, when I went to supper, and then during part of Matins I visited the stable to give them their food."[1]

Her retreat began, but she did not think that a sufficient excuse for seeking to be relieved of her wearisome and distracting duty, which she would have performed to the day of her profession, had not her mistress considered, at the end of some days, that she had been tried long enough, and forbidden her to look after the donkeys any more.

We need not think, however, that the time spent in watching them had been wasted as far as her soul was concerned, for she tells us herself that it was during these days of constant activity, when she was running to and fro, and had apparently no opportunity for recollection and contemplation, that she enjoyed the most familiar intercourse with her Divine Spouse, and received from Him clearer lights and sweeter consolations than she had ever known before. She goes so far as to say that she was perfectly happy in these strange occupations, which took up almost all her time, and that she should have felt neither trouble nor annoyance if they had lasted all her life. "My Lord was such a faithful companion," she writes, "that all my running about did not distress me at all. It was then that I received such great graces that I had never experienced any like them."[2] "Since Saul,

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 376. [2] *Ibid.*

when seeking asses, found the kingdom of Israel, I must win the kingdom of heaven by running after animals of the same sort."[1]

Sometimes Our Lord, wishing to prolong His mysterious colloquies with her who was soon to be espoused to Him for ever, and to allow her to pay undivided attention to them, Himself undertook to look after the two animals. This happened one day in the sight of all the community, who could not help regarding it as a miracle. Margaret Mary, absorbed in contemplation, had ceased to watch the she-ass and her foal, who had quietly escaped into the garden, where they were playing and frisking across the beds and among the fruit-trees. They were seen from the windows of the convent, and the alarm was given; nuns and novices rushed into the garden and, after driving out the intruders, began to look for the damage that they had done. But no trace of their escapade could be discovered, not a sod of earth was displaced, nor a blade of grass trampled down. Margaret Mary was questioned, and at last she had to confess what had taken place—how, taking advantage of her being in an ecstasy, the creatures had escaped; how, when she noticed them and wished to run after them, she was held back by her Divine Master, Who said: "Leave them alone, they will do no harm."

To this day, within the enclosure at Paray, there is a little group of nut-trees, well known to the pilgrims who go thither, and who are proud to receive a leaf or two plucked from the strong green

[1] Languet, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

branches springing from the ancient roots. According to a constant tradition in the convent, it was here that Our Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary, and "kept her company," as she says. One day at a later period, she passed the nut-trees with one of her sisters, and as she looked at them, she could not help remarking: "That is a place of grace for me."

Another incident that occurred during the retreat was one of the most important events in Margaret Mary's life, and cannot be passed over in silence.

The book of instructions, used by the mistress of novices, requires her to urge the young sisters, before taking the vows, to prepare for the ceremony by making a general confession of their whole life. Margaret Mary was eager to avail herself of this opportunity to purify her conscience, but, when she attempted to review all her past, before approaching the tribunal of penance, she was attacked again by scruples, as she had been before making her first general confession at Verosvres. To calm her anxiety, Our Lord Himself came to her assistance, saying: "Why dost thou torture thyself? do what is in thy power, and I will make good what is lacking. I desire nothing in this sacrament so much as a contrite and humble heart, which accuses itself without dissimulation, having a sincere wish never more to offend Me." She obeyed, and at the moment when the priest raised his hand to give her absolution, "I seemed," she says, "to see and feel myself stripped and yet at the same time clothed in a white robe, and I heard

the words: 'This is the robe of innocence with which I am clothing thy soul, in order that henceforth thou mayest live only the life of a Man-God, that is to say, that thou mayest live as if not living, but suffering Me to live in thee."[1]

The victim was thus made ready for the sacrifice. What was said of her vocation, when, fifteen months previously, she presented herself as a postulant at the convent, may be said equally well of the complete sacrifice that she made of herself to God in the beautiful and touching ceremony of her profession. We have seen how, as novice, she developed further the virtues that she possessed as a child and as a young girl, and we may be sure that there never was a more pure, humble, and generous sacrifice than that which she now made.

We have very few details regarding the actual ceremony. In her autobiography she tells us that on the day when she at last made her long-desired holy profession, "her Divine Master deigned to accept her as His spouse, but in a manner that she felt herself incapable of describing."[2]

The registers and traditions of the convent and her act of profession only give us the names of those who witnessed her solemn vows, and record the fact that on November 6 she had with her, in the chapel of the Visitation Convent at Paray, her mother, her two brothers, her uncle Lamyn, and other relatives and friends of the family. There was, however, one document of inestimable value, the words of which have come down to us, giving

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 387, etc. [2] *Ibid.*, II, p. 371.

us a clue to her feelings at the moment when, standing before the altar, she bound herself to her Divine Spouse by the threefold vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. This document consisted of the resolutions made during her retreat, and written down by her own hand, partly with her own blood, immediately after her general confession, perhaps on November 5.

We can easily understand how highly the nuns at Paray valued this record, which was, in their eyes, a real treasure. How often must they have pressed their lips lovingly upon this paper, that has been well described as "a sacred relic of the soul and blood" of St. Margaret Mary![1]

Unhappily it is no longer in their possession. They never consented to part with it until, towards the close of the great Revolution, the superior of the hospital at Paray, who had the precious manuscript in her charge, yielded to the urgent request of Abbé Gaudin, archpriest of Charolles, who, being in his agony, begged to be allowed to look at it and hold it in his hands, so that he might derive strength and consolation from this relic during his last moments. After his death it could not be found, and it is probably irretrievably lost.

But, as we have said, though the original has perished, the contents have been preserved of these lines written by Margaret Mary and suggested by Our Lord Himself. They are reproduced here literally, without any modification or omission.

[1] Abbé Cucherat: *Histoire populaire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie Alacoque.*

"These are my resolutions, which are to last all my life, since my Beloved has Himself dictated them. After I had received Him into my heart, He said to me: 'Behold the wound in My side, so as to make there thy real and permanent abode: it is there that thou wilt be able to preserve the robe of innocence with which I have clothed thy soul, in order that thou mayst live henceforth the life of a Man-God; live as if no longer alive, so that I may live perfectly in thee; thinking of thy body and of all that may befall it, as if it no longer existed, acting as if not acting, but I alone in thee. For this end it is necessary that thy powers and senses remain buried in Me, and that thou be deaf, dumb, blind, and insensible to all earthly things; thou must will as not willing, without judgment, without desire, without affection, and without any wish, save that of My good pleasure, which should be all thy delight: and seeking nothing apart from Me, if thou wouldst not insult My power and offend Me grievously, since I wish to be everything to thee.

"Be ever ready to receive Me, and I shall ever be ready to give Myself to thee, because thou wilt often be exposed to the fury of thine enemies. But fear nothing; I will encompass thee with My power, and will be the reward of thy victories. Beware of ever opening thine eyes to regard thyself apart from Me. Let it be thy motto to love and suffer blindly: one heart, one love, one God!"

The following are the words that St. Margaret Mary wrote with her own blood;

"I, poor, mean, and worthless creature, promise my God to submit myself and to suffer all that He desires of me, sacrificing my heart to the accomplishment of His good pleasure, regarding no other interest but His greater glory and His pure love, to which I consecrate and abandon all my being and every moment of my life. I belong for ever to my Beloved, I am His slave, servant, and creature, since He is all mine, and I am His unworthy spouse, Sister Margaret Mary, dead to the world. All from God and nothing from myself; all to God, and nothing to myself; all for God, and nothing for myself."

Is it possible for the offering of a soul to God to be more complete? Is this not the "charity which presseth us," as St. Paul says (2 Cor v. 14), words which Bossuet has expanded in language worthy of them; "It presseth us, by inciting us against ourselves; it presseth us, by lifting us above ourselves; it presseth us, by detaching us from ourselves; it presseth us, by uniting us to God; it presseth us, not less by the impulse of holy hatred than by the sweet transports of happy love."[1]

We may suppose that Margaret Mary felt these transports and impulses just after her profession when, lying covered by the pall, the symbol of her sacrifice and renunciation, she waited for the celebrant to say: "Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall enlighten thee,"—words which seem to sum up the contents of the passage that we have quoted above, in the same

[1] Bossuet: *Panégyrique de St. François de Paule.*

way as they sum up the full meaning of this touching part of the ceremony of a religious profession.

In the previous year, at Margaret Mary's clothing, Our Lord had lavished His choicest gifts on her whom He was accepting as His betrothed. Now, when she became His spouse, He was no less generous, and bestowed upon her in memory of her espousal a favour surpassing all that she had received hitherto. We will quote her own words, for there are some graces which those alone know how to describe, who have felt their action in their own souls. After just mentioning her profession, she adds: "From that time forth my Divine Master delighted me with His sacred presence in a manner such as I had never experienced before; never did I receive so great a favour, for its effects have made themselves constantly felt within me ever since. I saw Him, felt Him near me, and heard Him much better than if it had been with my bodily senses, by means of which I might have been able to distract myself and turn away from Him; but I could not offer any hindrance to this grace, for it owed nothing to my participation. This impressed upon me so deep a sense of my own nothingness, that I felt at first as if I had fallen and been annihilated in the depths of my unworthiness, whence I have never since been able to emerge, so intense has been my reverence and respect for this infinite greatness, before which I would fain always remain kneeling or prostrate on the ground; and this indeed I have done ever since,

as far as my occupations and my weakness permitted. He left me no peace in any less respectful position, and I ventured to sit down only when in someone else's presence, such was my sense of my own unworthiness, which He made me behold as so great that I no longer dared to appear except with strange confusion. This made me wish no one to remember me unless it were to despise, humiliate and upbraid me, since I deserve nothing eles."[1]

In spite of all this, the beginning of this unbroken intercourse with her Divine Spouse, dating from the time of her profession, was an uninterrupted series of unspeakable joys and a foretaste of paradise.

She had, however, come to the Visitation Convent only to suffer and sacrifice herself to the glory of God, and Our Lord Himself, having chosen her to be the victim of His Sacred Heart, revealed to her that she could not reach heaven except by the way of the Cross. She began, therefore, to feel some alarm, and to wonder whether her Divine Spouse had changed His mind and forgotten His promises and designs. At last she complained to Him, saying: "O my God, wilt Thou leave me always to live without suffering?"

One day she had just returned from the altar rails, uttering this complaint, when, during her thanksgiving, she had this vision: "I beheld first," she says, "a large cross, the end of which I could not see, but it was all covered with flowers." Then she heard Our Lord's voice, saying: "This is the

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 371, etc.

bed of My chaste spouses, where I will let thee enjoy all the fulness of My love: gradually the flowers will fall, and nothing will be left thee but the thorns that they now conceal because of thy weakness. These thorns will make thee feel their pricks so intensely, that thou wilt need all the strength of thy love to endure the pain." "These words gave me great joy," she adds, "for I thought there could never be enough suffering, humiliation, and contempt to satisfy my burning thirst for them, and that I never should find a greater suffering than that which I experienced in not suffering enough." One regret, however, was mingled with her pious gladness, and it was due to her seeing the bed of flowers covering the cross and diminishing its hardness. "Their sweetness troubled me," she says. "I desired the cross and nothing else, and therefore I would gladly have seen my body constantly crushed by austerities or labour, of which I took upon myself as much as my strength permitted, for I could not live a moment without suffering."

Would it be possible to feel more intensely or to describe with more touching eloquence a love of suffering and of the Cross? It must be acknowledged that at this period, St. Margaret Mary's love was still waning in prudence, and that at times it led her into excesses which somewhat contradict what she says, and prove that she did not always regulate her penances by her strength. Neither the orders of her superiors nor her spirit of obedience were able to keep her within due limits,

and her Divine Master Himself was forced to intervene. On one occasion she had obtained permission to take the discipline for the space of an *Ave maris stella*, and after doing so, she wished to go on and scourge herself yet more. As long as she was striking herself with her superior's consent, she heard Our Lord's voice saying at each blow: "That is for Me;" but when she went on beyond the permitted time, she heard Him say: "That is for the devil." Needless to say, she stopped at once.[1]

It was not long before God satisfied her desire, and began to remove one by one the flowers covering the cross, so that some thorns were displayed likely to cause wounds most painful to so refined a nature, which feared nothing so much as to be a burden to her sisters and to displease them.

Immediately after her profession, she was sent to the infirmary as assistant to Sister Catherine Augustine Marest, the infirmarian. No two people could have been found more utterly unlike in character and disposition. The one was calm, dignified, rather slow, and somewhat phlegmatic in her way of acting, which was in keeping with her humble, timid nature, wholly absorbed in God; the other was lively, active, and energetic, displaying an ardent and fiery mind in a vigorous body. She was really in close union with God, but seemed to delight in external activity, showing great skill and endurance, and the inexhaustible energy of her robust constitution never failed.[2]

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 378. [2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 445.

Two natures with so little in common could not be in almost perpetual contact, in the discharge of their joint office, without coming into collision. There is no need to assume, as Languet does (*op. cit.*, p. 89), that Sister Marest was a very zealous infirmarian, displaying so much charity towards the sick of whom she was in charge that she had very little left for the sisters who worked under her. The truth is that both she and Margaret Mary suffered, and caused one another to suffer. Between them was renewed the old conflict that existed between Martha and Mary. Sister Marest's quickness of disposition and manner, and her zeal (possibly somewhat exclusive) for active works disturbed Sister Alacoque's gentle calm; but the latter, by her distractions and unpunctuality, by her clumsiness and the accidents that inevitably resulted from it, was a great trial to her superior, who was most painstaking and precise, very punctual, and most attached to the spirit of poverty that she rightly regarded as one of the chief virtues of a nun. From her childhood, Margaret Mary had been considered rather clumsy and awkward, and this partly accounted for the abuse that she had to endure from her enemies at Lautecour, who found fault with her for having so little aptitude for household duties, but after her profession this kind of infirmity assumed an aggravated form. Everything slipped through her fingers, and she could scarcely walk without falling down. Her companions believed, as she did herself, that the devil had something to do with it. "He often made me stumble," she

says, "and break whatever I had in my hands, and then he used to jeer at me, and say: 'O you block-head, you will never be any good!' This plunged my mind into such deep sorrow and discouragement, that I did not know what to do. . . Once he flung me from the top of a staircase, as I was carrying an earthen pan full of charcoal, but none of it was spilt, and I found myself at the bottom without having hurt myself, although those who saw me fall thought that I had broken my legs, but I felt that my guardian angel had protected me."

Whilst recalling the first time when she was employed in the infirmary as assistant to Sister Marest (for she went back there later under the same infirmarian), St. Margaret Mary could not help saying: "God alone can know what I had to suffer there, as much through my impulsive and sensitive disposition as from my fellow-creatures and the devil."[1]

God certainly allowed her virtue to be tried in this way by her fellow-creatures and by the devil; but in addition He wished to test her Himself, and so He sent her privations and sufferings which must have been peculiarly painful to her scrupulous soul, since, coming directly from the hand of her Divine Spouse, they seemed to her to be a mark of His displeasure, and a chastisement for some secret and unknown infidelity, and as a rule they affected things which caused her very real and legitimate happiness.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 391.

For instance, one of her greatest delights was to unite with her sisters in singing the praises of God in choir, but in June of the year after her profession, she lost her voice completely, and was for some weeks deprived of this pleasure and condemned to silence. Here again we may refer to her own account of the matter, but the passage that we are about to quote is not taken from her autobiography, but from a memorandum that she wrote at the bidding of Mother de Saumaise, or rather of Our Lord, for Mother de Saumaise, perceiving that God continued to bestow extraordinary graces and gifts upon Margaret Mary after her profession, ordered her to write down what went on in her soul. The young nun felt at first an overpowering repugnance to this, and it was necessary for her Divine Master to speak to her and give her a lesson in true humility, saying: "Why dost thou refuse to obey My voice, and to record in writing what comes from Me and not from thyself, since mere compliance is all thou hast to do with it? Consider what thou art and what thou deservest, and then thou wilt be able to perceive whence comes the good that thou possessest." St. Margaret Mary yielded, and obeyed without further protest. Her manuscript has unhappily perished, but several ancient copies of it exist, and from them we can follow her step by step in the early part of her religious life. She describes the trial mentioned above in the following terms: "After having been for a long time unable to sing the Office—which cost me no small sorrow, so greatly did I rejoice in singing the praises of

my God, and also because I regarded this inability to speak as a just punishment for my carelessness (which caused me much humiliation)—on the eve of the Visitation, at Matins, I made several fruitless efforts to sing the invitatory, without succeeding even in following the choir, but at the first verse of the *Te Deum* I felt myself penetrated by a power to which all my powers turned in the spirit of homage and adoration. My arms were crossed inside my sleeves, and a Divine light appeared on them in the form of a little child, or rather of a brilliant sun, which made me say amidst the profound silence: 'My Lord and my God, by what excess of love dost Thou thus lower Thine infinite majesty?'—'I come, My daughter, to ask thee why thou dost so often beg Me not to approach thee.'—'Thou knowest, Lord, that it is because I am unworthy to approach Thee, and still more unworthy to touch Thee.'—'Know that the more thou regardest thyself as nothing, the more does My majesty lower itself to seek thee.' Fearing lest this might be an angel of Satan, I said: 'If this voice is Thine, O my God, suffer me to sing Thy praises.' At that very moment I felt that I could speak freely, and that my voice was stronger than ever. I joined in the *Te Deum* with the choir, and thus finished Matins. After keeping my voice for a considerable time I lost it again, and besought Our Lord to give it back to me, but He replied that it was not mine, that He had lent it me only to force me to believe, and that I ought to be as well pleased to lose it as to have it. Thenceforth I have

remained indifferent, nothing being more profitable for a soul than the most perfect indifference to everything."[1]

Some time previously, whilst making her thanksgiving after Holy Communion, she had earnestly prayed Our Lord never to allow anything extraordinary to appear in her, save what might cause her the most humiliation and contempt in the eyes of her fellow-creatures, and destroy their esteem for her. Our Saviour promised to grant this request, and we have just seen how faithfully He kept His word.

At a later date full justice was to be done to Margaret Mary, and it would be said that "God had given her much intelligence and a firm, shrewd, and penetrating judgment."[2]

One of her superiors, Mother Greyfié, who succeeded Mother de Saumaise and was herself one of the glories of the Order, was hereafter to declare that she was a religious well suited to succeed in everything, if God had not granted her request and allowed her to be unknown and overlooked in contempt and suffering.[3]

Those about her must have recognized her qualities and talents, since she was called to hold in turn every office in the convent except the highest of all, and that which, in the eyes of outsiders, is perhaps the lowest—that is to say, she was never superior and never portress.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 81, etc.
[2] Père Croiset, *op. cit.*
[3] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 374.

But in the meantime, anyone judging of her abilities and strength by her behaviour in the infirmary and the state of her health during the year after her profession, might well be tempted to ask what service she would ever be able to do to the community, and whether Our Lord had not forgotten the promise made some months previously, to act in such a way as that she should become more useful to the Order than it was then possible either to desire or to foresee. Far, however, from having forgotten this undertaking, Our Lord was preparing to keep His word, and the time was near when He intended to confer upon Margaret Mary the glorious mission, which was destined to bring honour upon the convent at Paray le Monial and the whole Visitation Order. It was with a view to this mission that He was treating her soul with peculiar care, and sanctifying it more and more by means of trials. At the same time, He was preparing her in another way also for the work that she had to do, and initiating her gradually into the Divine mysteries which it would be her duty to make known to the world.

Even before her profession Our Lord alluded plainly to what would be required of her at no distant a date, when He urged her, as we have said, to consent to be the victim of His Sacred Heart. During the year preceding the great apparitions and revelations, He was, if we may venture to say so, trying experiments and planning them. On various occasions He laid before her what may be termed rough outlines of them, more

detailed and more exact as the time for the full revelations approached.

One day, for instance, about six months after her profession, she was preparing for Holy Communion on the following morning, and tells us: "I begged my Jesus to unite my heart to His, since that was all I desired, yet I asked myself how it would be possible for what was nothing to be united to Him who is All. I know well, O God, that this Divine union is possible only through Thy love. . . . . Then He showed me, through the highest point of my understanding, His most beautiful Heart, more brilliant than the sun and of infinite magnitude. A tiny speck, like an ugly black atom, was trying to reach this glorious light, but it was all in vain, had not this loving Heart drawn it forward, saying: "Fling thyself into my greatness, and beware of ever leaving it, since, if thou leavest it, thou wilt never return."[1]

Another time she heard an inward voice telling her over and over again to be on her guard, for she was on the brink of a precipice. Being much troubled, and not knowing what risk she could be running, she addressed Our Lord, saying: "Thou Who art the only love of my soul, tell me what the danger is." A few minutes afterwards, whilst she was engaged in mental prayer, her contemporaries say that Our Lord appeared before her, covered with wounds, and bade her look at the opening in His sacred Side, which was a bottomless abyss, made by an arrow too great for measurement, the shaft,

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 80.

namely, of love. He told her that if she wished to avoid the gulf which she complained of not being able to know, she must plunge into this abyss, for it would enable her to escape all others, and was the dwelling of those who loved Him. In it were to be found two lives: the one for the soul and the other for the heart. The soul discovered there the springs of living water to purify itself and receive at the same time the life of grace, lost by sin. The heart found in that wound a furnace of love, suffering it no longer to live any but a life of love. The one was sanctified and the other perfected there, and as the opening was very narrow, it behoved her to be little and detached from everything in order to enter thither.[1]

Another time she fell into great sadness; "I felt my soul," she says, "in a most painful agony, until Our Lord, deigning to honour me with a visit, said: 'Enter, daughter, into this delightful garden, that thou mayst refresh thy weary soul there.' I perceived that the garden was His Sacred Heart, and that the diversity of the flowers in it was as great as their beauty was wonderful. After I had looked at them all without venturing to touch them, He told me to gather whatever I liked. Casting myself at His feet, I exclaimed: 'O my Divine Saviour, I wish for nothing but Thyself, for Thou art to me a bundle of myrrh that I wish to carry always in the arms of my affection.'—'Thou hast chosen well,' replied our Saviour; 'nothing but myrrh can preserve its beauty and fragrance. This

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 83.

life is its time and season; there is none in eternity, or else it is known there by another name.'"[1]

Thus Our Lord's adorable Heart with all its wealth of mercy and love, with its infinite perfections and its sanctifying examples, was gradually being revealed to her who was destined ere long to be its apostle.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 97.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT REVELATIONS

ON December 27, 1673, the feast of St. John the Evangelist, Margaret Mary had a little more free time than usual, and Sister Marest, relaxing her habitual strictness, gave her permission to leave the infirmary for some time, so she hurried to the chapel, and knelt down close to the grille of the choir. As she knelt in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament exposed upon the High Altar, she was favoured with the first of those celebrated visions known as the great revelations of the Sacred Heart. The altar, before which she knelt, no longer exists, but has been replaced by another, larger and more ornamental. The grille, too, has been renewed, but otherwise the place has not changed; both altar and grille occupy the same positions as in the seventeenth century: the altar is at the back of the sanctuary, the grille is on the right of it, at the epistle side. It is therefore easy for anyone in the chapel to imagine the whole scene.

Margaret Mary was as close as possible to both the grille and the altar, kneeling upright and motionless, in the attitude that she generally assumed in Our Lord's presence, and that aroused

the surprise of all her sisters and the admiration of most of them.

All at once she felt herself "invested" (to use her own expression) with this Divine presence. The impression made upon her was so great that she forgot everything else: the place where she was, the passage of time, and even her own personality, seeing nothing but the spirit which had taken possession of her soul and was holding it in captivity, abandoning herself wholly to the action of this spirit and "giving her heart up to the force of her love."

Being thus rapt in ecstasy, she heard Our Lord inviting her to take the place at His Side which St. John had occupied during the Last Supper.

She says: "He made me lean for a long time on His Divine breast, whilst He revealed to me the marvels of His love and the inexplicable secrets of His Sacred Heart,—things which He had hitherto always hidden from me, and now disclosed for the first time. But He did it in so plain and effective a manner as to leave me no room for doubting it, such were the results that this grace produced in me, who am always afraid of deceiving myself with regard to what I assert to take place within me. This is how it seems to me that the matter occurred.—He said to me: 'My Divine Heart is so passionately in love with men, and with thee in particular, that it can no longer contain within itself the flames of its ardent charity, and must needs spread them by thy means, and manifest itself to men and enrich them with the precious treasures that I will reveal to thee. These treasures contain

the graces of salvation and sanctification, necessary to draw men out of the abyss of perdition, and I have chosen thee, as a very abyss of unworthiness and ignorance, for the accomplishment of this great design, in order that all may be done by Me.'

"Afterwards, He asked for my heart, which I implored Him to take, and having done so, He placed it within His adorable Heart, showing it to me as a little atom being consumed in a glowing furnace, and then withdrawing it thence like a burning flame in the shape of a heart, He replaced it whence He had taken it, saying: 'Behold, My beloved, a precious pledge of My love, which is inserting in thy side a tiny spark of its most fiery flames, to serve as thy heart and to consume thee until thy last moment. Its heat will not diminish, nor will any relief be found save to a slight degree by bleeding, and I will mark the blood so plainly with My cross, that it will bring thee more humiliation and suffering than alleviation. This is why I desire thee simply to ask for it, as much for thee to practise what is required of thee by thy rule, as to give thee the consolation of shedding thy blood on the cross of humiliations. And in token that the great favour I have just done thee is not imaginary, but the foundation of all those that I still have to bestow upon thee, although I have closed the wound in thy side, the pain of it shall ever remain with thee; and though hitherto thou hast adopted the name of My slave, I now give thee that of the beloved disciple of My Sacred Heart.'"[1]

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 179 *et seq.*

It seemed expedient to quote the whole of this passage and not to interrupt it by any remarks, but we must now refer to certain points in it that need explanation or at least comments.

Let us begin by calling to mind how timid and anxious Margaret Mary was, constantly on her guard against herself and the enemy of souls, and always fearing least she should be the dupe of illusions proceeding from her own imagination or from the devil's cunning. On this occasion she did not for a moment question the reality of the vision that she describes, and her conviction and certainty were not due to the external and, so to say, palpable sign, which our Lord gave her in the pain in her side, that never left her. This sign was given for the benefit of others, and we shall see later on how it helped to overcome the most obstinate prejudices on the part of her superiors and companions. But what made it impossible for Margaret Mary to doubt, were the vision itself and the marvellous and irresistible effects that it produced in her soul.

The science of ascetics distinguishes several kinds of apparitions and visions, that are described as corporeal, imaginative, or intellectual, according to the organ or faculty of our moral or physical being that is affected by them. These varieties of visions may be arranged in order of importance : those that affect the imagination rank higher than the corporeal, and the intellectual stand above the other two. This classification is quite legitimate, and based upon reason. The senses affected by bodily or corporeal visions are inferior to the faculties affected

by those that are imaginative or intellectual. Of the latter two classes, the intellect is naturally superior to the imagination, and is less subject to any illusions, moreover the devil has little or no hold upon it, whereas he has great influence over our senses, and some amount of power over our imagination. Corporeal or bodily visions are sometimes granted to lukewarm souls, to those who have not yet passed beyond the lowly paths of the purgative way, and even to sinners; imaginative visions are usually permitted to souls that have made more progress, and it would seem that intellectual visions are reserved exclusively for the Saints. The point most important to us at the present moment, is that intellectual and imaginative visions have such an effect on the soul, and impart such intense calmness, peace, sweetness, light and comprehension;—in short, fill it with such absolute certainty, that it is impossible to doubt for a moment that they proceed from God, or to suppose that the devil and self-deception have anything to do with them.

St. Teresa, who speaks from experience, gives an admirable account of the wonderful effects of these visions in two passages in her autobiography. In chapter xxvii she speaks of a purely intellectual vision, when she felt Our Lord beside her and accompanying her wherever she went, though she saw nothing.[1]

"This kind of vision," she says, "gives us such

[1] The reader will remember that St. Margaret Mary had had a similar experience at the time of her profession.

clear knowledge that it seems to exclude the possibility of doubt. Our Lord wishes it to be so deeply engraved on our understanding, that we can no more doubt it than what we behold with our bodily eyes, indeed far less; for when anything meets our eyes, we may sometimes wonder whether it is not an illusion, but here, though the doubt may present itself at the first moment, there is always an underlying certainty that there is no reason for the doubt."

In the next chapter St. Teresa speaks of the wonderful light amidst which, in an imaginative vision, Our Lord revealed to her the Divine beauty of His Sacred humanity, and says: "This light infinitely surpasses the light of this world, and in comparison with its rays, dazzling the rapt eye of the soul, the sun's rays lose their lustre so completely that no one would even open his eyes to behold them. It is a day without night, always light and luminous, that nothing can darken. It is such that the most piercing intellect could never conceive, though it might spend a lifetime in striving to do so. God displays this light so suddenly that there would be no time to open one's eyes to see it, even if it were necessary. But it matters not whether the eyes be open or shut. When Our Lord wishes us to see, then, whether we like it or not, we must see. No kind of distraction, resistance, care, or occupation can prevent this light from reaching us. I have often had experience of this fact."

The biographers of St. Margaret Mary are

agreed in regarding as an imaginative vision the one that she had on December 27, 1673, when she received so much clear light on the love of the Sacred Heart for men and on her own future.

It was not with her bodily eyes that she beheld Our Lord drawing her to Himself and making her lean on His Heart, nor did she actually see Him take the heart of His humble little servant and plunge it into His own, to transform it and turn it into a burning flame, proceeding from the furnace of infinite love. It all really took place within her soul; her external, bodily senses were unaffected by these wonderful apparitions, that were perceived exclusively by the internal eye of the mind. But we may probably believe that an intellectual vision accompanied the imaginative one. Not only did Margaret Mary behold the supernatural and miraculous apparition with the eyes of her imagination so clearly as to be able to describe it with precision and in detail, but her intellect grasped its significance, which was plainly and distinctly revealed by Our Lord Himself. Thus at the same moment and within the same soul there were united and blended together two kinds of visions, which, according to the testimony of many mystics, are very rarely, and perhaps never, separated one from the other.[1]

Consequently the double light of an imaginative and of an intellectual vision suddenly shone upon

[1] On this point, and also on the subject of supernatural visions in general, see J. Ribet, *La Mystique divine*, part 2 chs. i, ii, iii, and iv.

Margaret Mary's intelligence, and gave her a very clear and almost overpowering perception of the wonders hidden within Our Saviour's adorable Heart, and of the mission which was about to be entrusted to her.

By means of this sudden enlightenment, she penetrated farther and more deeply than ever before into the mysteries of the Sacred Heart. For over a year, as we have seen, they had been disclosed to her in visions that may be called preparatory, preceding the great revelations with which we have now to deal, and they had given her very special and lively insight into this abyss of mercy and love. But such was the abundance of light and grace given her on this particular day, that she does not hesitate to say that Our Lord revealed to her then for the first time "the marvels of His love and the inexplicable secrets of His Sacred Heart, which He had previously always concealed from her." Hitherto He had treated her with favour and affection indeed, but still as a servant; henceforth He treated her as a disciple, who would shortly become an apostle.

Another light that Margaret Mary derived from this first great revelation of the Sacred Heart, was her knowledge of the mission reserved for her in the Church by our Saviour. The former visions had concerned herself alone, and had been for her personal instruction or consolation, but that of December 27, 1673, was to be for the good of the whole Church and of all the human race, and Our Lord appeared to her, on that day, less in order to

console and instruct her, than to bid her make known to the world the treasures of light and grace that He allowed her to behold and enjoy for a moment. The mission entrusted to her was no doubt a great honour; but it was also a burden, and sometimes a heavy one, especially as it was laid upon her who desired nothing more ardently (as she herself tells us) than to be buried in perpetual forgetfulness of creatures.[1]

Her desire went for nothing, however, when once the Master had spoken, and spoken so clearly that she could no longer doubt the authenticity of the commands laid upon her, and we shall see how, in spite of her natural repugnance, she was ready to bear any suffering, to accept any sacrifice, to endure all possible insults, in order to obey them.

Before we go on to see how she accomplished her task, we must finish our account of the supernatural manifestations by means of which it pleased our Divine Master to lay the foundations of the new devotion which He intended to establish in His Church. Though the vision of December 27, 1673, was most plain and emphatic, Our Lord had not given the full revelations, and—to use St. Margaret Mary's own expressions—"the great grace bestowed upon her then was only the basis of all those other graces that He still had to bestow." For more than eighteen months, viz., from December, 1673, until June, 1675, He appeared to her at intervals, adding each time something fresh to the original design. These appearances form one

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 337.

homogeneous whole, and are in close interconnection; they supplement, explain, and throw light on one another when set side by side, and therefore it seems expedient to group them together and present them to the reader consecutively and without interruption further than is necessary to point out the immediate consequences of each, and to see what effect they had, not only on Margaret Mary's own life, but on the Order to which she belonged and on the Church at that period.

A few weeks, or possibly a couple of months, after the first great revelation of the Sacred Heart, there was another, the date of which cannot be fixed precisely. There are grounds for believing that it took place on a Friday, early in the year 1674. In a letter written to Father Croiset on November 3, 1689, St. Margaret Mary describes this second revelation as follows: "This Divine Heart was shown me on a throne of flames; it was more resplendent than the sun and transparent as crystal; it had its own adorable wound, and was surrounded by a crown of thorns, signifying the stings caused by our sins, and there was a cross above it, implying that from the first moment of the Incarnation, that is to say, as soon as the Sacred Heart was formed, the cross was planted in it, and it was filled from the first instant of its existence with all the bitterness of the humiliations, poverty, sorrow, and contempt which the Sacred Humanity was to endure during the whole course of His life, and in His Sacred Passion. He showed me also that the ardent desire that He had of being loved by men

and of rescuing them from the path of perdition, where Satan drags them in crowds, had made Him form the design of manifesting His Heart to them, with all the treasures of love, of mercy, of graces, of sanctification, and salvation which it contains, in order that He might enrich all who were willing to render to it, and procure for it, all the love, honour, and glory in their power, with the profusion of these Divine treasures of the Heart of a God from which they spring. He told me that this Heart was to be honoured under the form of a heart of flesh, the picture of which He wished to be exposed and worn by me on my heart, in order to impress its love upon my heart, and fill it with all the gifts with which His Heart is full, and so destroy all irregular movements within it. He said that wherever this holy picture should be exposed to be honoured, He would lavish His graces and blessings, and that this blessing was a last effort of His love to favour men in these latter times with a most loving redemption, to deliver them from the thraldom of Satan, which He intended to overthrow, that He might place us under the gentle liberty of the dominion of His love, which He wished to re-establish in the hearts of all those willing to practise this devotion."[1]

When our Lord appeared to St. Margaret Mary in 1673, He laid, as it were, the foundation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, and revealed

[1] This is a translation of Hamon's version, *op. cit.*, p. 56, etc. We have followed the same author also with regard to the date of the second revelation.

its source and origin, which is His love of men, a love so passionate that, unable to contain Himself, He desired to make it known to the world, and to spread abroad His treasures of mercy and charity, through the agency of His humble servant. On the second occasion, our Divine Master went a step further, and revealed, at least partially, the object of this devotion, and the pious practices accompanying it. The cross, the crown of thorns, and the wound in the Sacred Heart commemorate His Passion, as well as the sufferings and insults that He endured throughout His life on earth, and will endure in every age in the Sacrament of His love; and these things teach us that the spirit of the devotion to be inaugurated in the Church was to be one of reparation. But the heart of flesh, surrounded with these emblems of suffering, teaches us another lesson, for it shows us under what form we are to honour it. Those who revered the Sacred Heart of Jesus were to wear a picture of it, drawn in accordance with the revelation made to Margaret Mary. All the representations of the Sacred Heart, all pictures, medals, and carvings were to be made after the same pattern, which became the standard in use among the faithful. The same design was followed in a celebrated drawing,[1] the work of a nun at Paray-le-Monial, or possibly of St.

[1] This picture was long treasured as a sacred relic at Paray, but in 1738 the community there, displaying more generosity than wisdom, gave it to the Visitation Convent at Turin, where it still exists. A facsimile of it appears in Hamon's work, between pp. 352 and 353.

Margaret Mary herself, which was put on the altar of the noviciate, and in 1685 was venerated for the first time by the novices, who had learnt this devotion, so dear to her heart, from their holy mistress.

We see therefore that the second revelation was an advance upon the first, and a similar advance can be traced in each successive vision, so that the four great revelations form what we may venture to call a Divine tetralogy, containing all the mysteries of the Sacred Heart, as well as its teaching and promises.

The date of the third vision is, like that of the second, quite uncertain. St. Margaret Mary only tells us that it took place when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and seems to suggest that it was on a Friday.[1]

Hence Mgr. Bougaud conjectures[2] that it occurred on the Friday within the octave of Corpus Christi, early in June, 1674.

The following is her own account of it: "On one occasion whilst the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, I felt wholly drawn within myself by an extraordinary recollection of all my senses and powers. Jesus Christ, my gentle Master, presented Himself to me, all resplendent with glory, His five wounds shining like so many suns. From His sacred Humanity issued flames on all sides, especially from His adorable Breast, which resembled a furnace, and which was open, disclosing to me His most loving and most lovable Heart, the

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 381.

[2] *Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, ch. ix.

living source of these flames. It was then that He discovered to me the unspeakable wonders of His pure love, and to what excess He had gone in loving men from whom He received only ingratitude and neglect, 'Which I feel much more' (He said) "than all that I suffered in My Passion. If only they made Me some return for My love, I should think but little of all that I have done for them, and should wish, if it were possible, to do yet more. But they have only coldness and rebuffs to give Me in return for all My eagerness to do them good. Do thou at least give Me consolation by making up for their ingratitude as far as thou art able.'

"I reminded Him of my weakness, and He replied: 'Here is what will make good all that is wanting to thee.' At the same time, His Sacred Heart being open, there issued from it a flame so hot that I thought to be consumed by it, for I was penetrated by its heat, and being no longer able to endure it, I besought Him to take pity upon my weakness. 'I will be thy strength,' was His reply, 'fear nothing, but listen to My voice and attend to what I require of thee to fit thee for the accomplishment of My designs. In the first place, thou shalt receive me in the Blessed Sacrament as often as obedience will allow thee, no matter what mortifications and humiliation may result to thee, but they must be regarded as pledges of My love. Moreover, thou shalt receive Holy Communion on the first Friday of each month, and every Thursday night I will make thee share the heavy sorrow that it was My will to feel in the Garden of Olives.

This sadness will bring thee, without thy comprehension, to a state of agony, harder to bear than death. In order to be with Me in that humble prayer which I then offered to My Father in the midst of My agony, thou shalt rise between eleven o'clock and midnight, so as to lie prostrate with Me for an hour, with thy face on the ground, both to appease God's anger, and ask mercy for sinners, and also to sweeten in some measure the bitterness that I felt when abandoned by My apostles, who forced Me to reproach them with not being able to watch with Me one hour. During this hour thou shalt do what I will teach thee. But listen, My daughter, and do not lightly believe or trust every spirit, for Satan is eager to deceive thee. Wherefore do nothing without the approval of those who guide thee, in order that, having the authority of obedience, thou mayst not be misled by him, for he hath no power over those who are obedient."[1]

We see here that our Lord's intentions and desires are becoming more precise, and that He now reveals plainly what is to be the aim of those who devote themselves to His Sacred Heart, and how they are to act. The devotion is to be a work of reparation, and our Saviour no longer makes us know, or rather guess, His sorrows and wishes by means of symbols and by showing the instruments of His Passion; He tells us plainly how much He feels the ingratitude of men, who display only indifference or hostility to Him in return for all that He has done and is still prepared to do for

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 381 *et seq.*

them. He tells Margaret Mary that He relies upon her to secure the making of some amends for all the insults He has suffered, and, going into details, He describes the principal means by which she, and all who respond to His appeal, can give Him the satisfaction that He craves. These means are the pious practices now in use among Catholics eager to testify their devotion to the Sacred Heart. They are careful to receive Holy Communion on the First Friday of every month; but this is not all, and how many have complied with the precept that might seem to have been addressed exclusively to Margaret Mary, requiring her to spend an hour in prayer each week, during the night between Thursday and Friday, in memory of Our Lord's agony, and in union with His prayers and desolation in the Garden of Gethsemani! There are at the present time thousands who practise this devotion, and are united in the Confraternity of the Holy Hour, a great association of reparation, which originated at Blessed Margaret Mary's tomb. The register of association is kept on the altar of the little chapel into which the room where she died has been transformed. Every page of the book is covered with names of people belonging to the highest, as well as the lowest, social standing, of men in the church, the army, and the government, as well as of cloistered religious.[1]

Yet the revelations were not complete even after the third vision. For the cultus of the Sacred Heart to be definitely established, something more

[1] *Cf. Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 621, etc.

was required than to accustom people to go to Holy Communion on the First Friday of each month, or to enrol a multitude of fervent souls in the association of the Holy Hour; it was necessary for a special festival to be introduced into the Church. Four centuries earlier a similar innovation had been made in the Catholic liturgy, and the feast of Corpus Christi had been instituted by the Holy See. It, too, owed its origin to the efforts, prayers, and above all, to the sufferings and heroic perseverance of a religious, St. Juliana of Mont-Cornillon, whose life and mission resemble in many points those of St. Margaret Mary. Ever since that time, there has been a feast of the Blessed Sacrament, giving public and solemn expression of the faith, love and gratitude of Christians towards our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. The moment had now come, when there was to be a feast also in honour of the Sacred Heart, the objects of which should be to make reparation to Our Lord present in the tabernacle for the indifference and insults of men, and to offer to the Sacred Heart, the symbol of that Divine love of which the Holy Eucharist is the supreme expression, our repentance and compassion. To establish this feast was the purpose of the fourth great revelation, the most glorious, solemn, decisive and divine of all, so much so, that someone has justly said : " We ought to be on our knees when we listen to the story of this wonderful revelation of the Heart of Jesus to His servant."[1]

[1] *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, publiée par le Monastère de Paray, p. 114.

The date of it is better known than those of the two preceding revelations, although we cannot fix it with absolute certainty. St. Margaret Mary says that it took place within the octave of Corpus Christi in 1675, and we know that in that year the feast fell on June 13, so that the revelation occurred between that date and June 20. The first three visions had followed one another at comparatively short intervals, but a whole year intervened between the third and fourth.

Bougaud suggests [1] that Our Lord allowed so long a time to elapse, because He wished to give her time to recover from the overpowering emotion caused by the earlier revelations, which often reduced her to such a condition that those about her believed her to be at the point of death. Perhaps it was rather because, before giving the culminating revelation, He waited until the excitement among the nuns, due to the disclosure of facts so extraordinary and so incompatible with the usual quiet and united life of a Visitation convent, should have abated, and until the violent opposition to St. Margaret Mary should have died down, so that this last supreme revelation, which was the climax of them all, might be received with less distrust and prejudice, if not with unanimous acceptance, and might be examined calmly, impartially, and without hostility.

St. Margaret Mary gives the following account of this final revelation: "Being on one occasion before the Blessed Sacrament, one day during its

[1] *Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, ch. ix.

octave, I received from my God excessive tokens of His love, and felt myself desirous to make some return and to render Him love for love; then He said to me: 'Thou canst not make Me any better return than by doing what I have so often asked of thee.' Then, uncovering His Divine Heart, He said: 'Behold this Heart which hath so much loved men, that it hath spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to give them testimony of its love, and in return I mostly receive only ingratitude, through their irreverence and sacrilege, and through the coldness and scorn that they have for Me in this Sacrament of love. What causes Me most sorrow is that there are hearts consecrated to Me who treat Me thus. Therefore I ask of thee that the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi be set apart for a special feast in honour of My Heart, by communicating on that day, and by making it solemn reparation and honourable amends to make good the insults that it receives during the time when it is exposed on the altars. I promise thee also that My Heart will expand, so as to shed abundantly the influence of its Divine love upon those who render it this honour and induce others to render it.' "

It was thus that the Divine Master disclosed all His secret to His faithful disciple. She knew everything now—her Saviour's intentions, and the means whereby, powerless and obscure as she was, she could and must labour for their accomplishment. In fifteen months she had been fully instructed by the Sacred Heart, and thenceforth there was some-

thing new in the Church. A fresh seed had been planted, destined to produce marvellous fruits of sanctification and salvation. A new era was about to open for souls. What was the moment chosen by God for inaugurating it?

In speaking of the birth of Margaret Mary, we pointed out that she came into the world during the brilliant but stormy period when Anne of Austria was regent and the disturbances of the Fronde were going on; and we remarked that if anyone had attempted to foretell the destiny of the child born at Lautecour, his voice would have been drowned by the noise of merrymaking and the din of battle.

A somewhat similar thought is suggested by a consideration of the state of society, literature, politics and war during the two years marked by the revelations of the Sacred Heart. The reign of Louis XIV was at the height of its glory. French literature of the seventeenth century had entered upon that period which particularly deserves to be known as "great," when one masterpiece followed another in almost uninterrupted succession; Racine was writing his most beautiful tragedies, Boileau his *Art poétique*, La Fontaine his *Fables*, and La Rochefoucauld his *Maximes;* Bossuet was often heard preaching sermons and funeral orations, and Bourdaloue, his successor in the pulpit, was acquiring a great reputation, whilst La Bruyère in his *Caractères* and Mme. de Sévigné in her incomparable letters, were storing up for us precious records of the time in which they lived,

the former in a series of cameos imperishable in their high relief, the latter in a number of rapid and brilliant sketches, the colours of which have lost none of their vividness, even though more than two hundred years have passed since they were written.

Whilst poets, moralists and orators were supplying their contemporaries with such abundant food for the mind, universal attention was constantly attracted to the events of the wars, to the intrigues of diplomacy, and to the vast administration at the head of which was Colbert. It is enough to remind the reader that this was the time of the war in Holland, which began with achievements so brilliant as to savour almost of romance; but later on it involved a struggle on the part of France against the genius and growing popularity of William of Orange, the coalition of all Europe, roused to jealousy and alarm by the French successes, and the hostile force of the elements. Condé was gathering his last laurels as a soldier at Seneffe, a few months only before his retirement to Chantilly, and when fortune finally favoured the French, the peace of Nimeguen was concluded, after which the city of Paris bestowed upon the King a great mark of admiration by conferring on him the title of *Louis le Grand*. The same feeling of enthusiasm, and almost of adoration, had been displayed not long previously, after the second and complete conquest of Franche-Comté, in May, 1674 (the year in which the second and third revelations were made to Margaret Mary), when Colbert said, in writing to

Louis XIV: "We must be speechless with admiration and gratitude to God all the days of our life, for having caused us to be born in the reign of such a monarch as your Majesty, whose power is limited only by his own will."[1]

Was it likely that at a time such as this, the interest of the world and the Court, and of the nation as a whole, could be aroused by the visions of an obscure young Visitation nun at Paray?

Four centuries before the first great revelation on December 27, 1673, but also on the feast of St. John, the beloved apostle appeared to St. Gertrude, who asked him how it was that he, whose head had rested on Our Lord's breast at the last supper, had not written a single line for our instruction and edification regarding his Divine Master's Heart. St. John replied: "My mission was to utter to the infant Church a simple statement regarding the uncreated Word of God the Father, which should suffice to nourish the intelligence of the whole human race even to the end of the world, without any one being able fully to understand it. To speak, however, of the sweetness of His Heart's pulsations has been reserved for later times, that, through hearing of such things, the world, when growing old and losing its love of God, may regain its fervour."[2]

[1] Quoted by Gaillardin, *Histoire du Règne de Louis XIV*, vol. iv., p. 149.

[2] *Revelationes Gertrudianæ ac Mechtildianæ: Legatus Divinæ Pietatis*, lib. iv, cap. iv, ed. Oudin, 1875, t. i, p. 305. In festo vero ejusdem Apostoli inter Matutinas, more sibi solito devotius intendenti affuit idem dilectus Discipulus. . . .

The seventeenth century, when St. Margaret Mary received the revelations of the Sacred Heart, seemed to have been the predicted period of spiritual indifference, marked by a decline of piety and love of God. Such an assertion may at first sight appear surprising, for the seventeenth was the century in which many notable Christians lived: for instance, St. Vincent de Paul, St. John Eudes, Berulle, Olier, Mlle. Legras, Mme. Acarie, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Fénelon. Although the first few names in this list are those of persons no longer alive at the period with which we are concerned, their works and admirable institutions lived after them, and their influence on souls and on society in general continued to make itself felt through their immediate successors. Nevertheless an evil influence prevailed at the same time, in complete antagonism to theirs, and men with keen insight were beginning to foretell a speedy decline in morals and piety, a weakening of the faith in the minds of men, and of the love of God in their hearts.

The years when the reign of Louis XIV reached its highest point of luxury and ostentation, were

---

Tunc illa: "Et cur hoc ita penitus conticuisti, quod nec quicquam vel modice saltem exinde nostris profectibus intelligendum conscripsisti?" Respondit: "Meum profecto erat novellæ adhuc Ecclesiæ de increato Dei Patris Verbo unum describere verbum, de quo usque in finem mundi sufficienter carpere posset intellectus generis humani totius, quamvis a nullo tamen unquam plene possit comprehendi. Eloquentia autem suavitatis pulsuum istorum reservata est moderno tempori, ut ex talium audientia recalescat jam senescens et amore Dei torpescens mundus."

those also of scandalous immorality. Jansenism, that disloyal heresy, as Lacordaire calls it, seemed for a time to have been suppressed, when the famous peace of Clement IX was made, but it revived later with renewed vigour, and after the government decided to take stern measures against it, Jansenism derived from persecution the prestige and respect that are generally accorded to its victims, especially when they can make people believe them to have suffered unjustly. Never was Jansenism more in vogue than at the time with which we are concerned, and every day it was gaining fresh sympathizers and converts from among the nobility and the ruling classes, and even at Court.

Great corruption prevailed in the highest circles, where the example set by the royal family found many followers. It was the time when Louis, who was soon to be called "the Great," and who for many reasons deserved the title, was exalting concubinage to a public service and royal bastards to an honourable position.[1]

The king's mistresses were on a level with his lawful wife, or very little below her at Court festivals and on royal progresses. In 1671, when the king was travelling in Flanders, the country people watching the royal procession saw Marie-Thérèse, Mlle. de la Vallière, and Mme. de Montespan grouped together in a curious medley, and called them "the three queens," an expression revealing their shrewdness and ready wit.[2]

[1] Gaillardin : *Histoire du Règne de Louis XIV*, vol. iii, p. 567.
[2] Gaillardin, *loc. cit.*, vol. iii, p. 576.

Modelling their conduct upon that of their sovereign, princes, ministers, and great lords paid no more respect than he did to the laws of morality and to family ties. Most shameful disorders were hidden beneath the brilliant surface of a society that appeared noble and stately when viewed superficially. Immorality was, as it were, a mark of good style and fine education, and men boasted of things for which they should have blushed. "Even impurity," as Bossuet says in one of his sermons, "that is to say, shame itself, which is called brutality when it proceeds to open debauchery, struts forth boldly, caring very little to disguise itself under a fair semblance of fidelity, discretion, gentleness and perseverance. Is it not considered worthy of a hero? The name of gallantry has been substituted for that of impurity, and we see the fashionable world regard those free from such attachments as savages and boors."

Not only were morals suffering degradation, but the Faith, which a century before had valiantly resisted the assaults of Protestantism in France, now underwent a most dangerous and disastrous attack on the part of Jansenism, which has been well described as "Protestantism ashamed of itself."[1]

This miserable heresy denied the existence of love in God, and destroyed it in men. Its conception of God is symbolized by the style of crucifix that it favoured, on which Our Lord is not represented with His arms stretched wide to embrace all, if possible, within the bounds of His mercy,

[1] Bougaud, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

and with His eyes turned towards the earth as if He were calling sinners to Him, but His hands are drawn straight up above His head, suggesting that only a few chosen souls are permitted to receive forgiveness and enjoy the benefits of redemption, and His eyes turned towards heaven, as if seeking to avoid the sight of our sinful world.

It is easy to understand how men would soon cease to love God when their faith in His love for them was undermined. Under the fatal influence of Jansenism, many souls, alarmed and discouraged by the severity of the new doctrine, abandoned the practice of their religion and fell into a state of indifference towards it, which culminated in the positive impiety of the next century. Others, though they remained faithful to God, or thought that they did so, gave Him nothing but a forced homage, feeling neither love nor devotion, so that we may reverse St. John's famous saying, and assert that in their case fear had cast out charity.

Through fear and want of love numbers stood aloof from Holy Communion, being guided by Arnauld and his book on *Frequent Communion*, a work of which it was said that, since the publication of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, no book of devotion had had so much effect or produced greater results.[1]

The effects produced by these two books were widely different. St. Francis of Sales excelled in winning over the most prejudiced worldlings, and in reconciling them to religion, which he represented

[1] Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, vol. ii, p. 168.

in its most attractive and pleasing colours, without, however, diminishing its necessary severity, but the Jansenist writer seemed to delight in depicting it under the most forbidding form. The former brought back multitudes of lost sheep to the fold, the latter checked the ardour of those really desirous of union with God, and caused the holy table to be left desolate. Scarcely had five years elapsed since the publication of *Frequent Communion*, when St. Vincent de Paul, perceiving its disastrous influence, wrote to one of his missionary priests thus: "It is true, Sir, that there are only too many people who make a bad use of this Divine Sacrament, and I, miserable man that I am, do so more than anyone else, and I beg you to help me in asking forgiveness of God. But reading this book, instead of encouraging men to go frequently to Communion, makes them refrain from it. We no longer see this Sacrament frequented as it was not only at Easter, but also at other times. Many parish priests in Paris complain that they have fewer communicants than in past years. At Saint-Sulpice there are three thousand less, and the parish priest of St. Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, on visiting the families in his parish after Easter, says that he found fifteen hundred of his parishioners who had not made their Easter Communion, and others tell the same story."[1]

A book and a doctrine, in which the spirit and true tradition of the Church are entirely misunderstood and distorted, were destined to continue to have

[1] *Lettres de St. Vincent de Paul*, vol. ii, p. 91.

increasingly bad effects for nearly two hundred years, influencing not only the practice of the faithful, but also the conduct of the clergy. As recently as the beginning of the nineteenth century there were parish priests who, when giving an account to the Bishop of the condition of their parish, were wont to boast, as if it were a favour from heaven, and a mark of the success of their ministry, that they had not once, from one Easter to the next, been called upon to open the tabernacle to give Holy Communion to a single one of their parishioners.

We have tried to give some idea of the dangers to which souls were exposed in the latter part of the seventeenth century—dangers due on the one hand to unbridled love of pleasure and on the other to the growth of Jansenism. This was the time chosen by our Saviour to reveal to Margaret Mary, and through her to the whole Christian world, the mysteries and desires of His Heart. No more efficacious and suitable remedy could have been found for the two evils of which we have been speaking. Whether we look at the licence of the Court at Versailles or the gloomy severity of the followers of Jansenius and Arnauld, we see that the revelation of the Sacred Heart was in direct contrast to each, for that Heart is called by the Church a "glowing furnace of charity," and an "abyss of all virtues."

According to the revelation made by St. John to St. Gertrude, the knowledge of the Sacred Heart was the great gift reserved for centuries by God in

His mercy, and the new grace destined for modern times.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart was not, however, an absolute novelty, as its enemies, and particularly the Jansenists, declared it to be, going even so far as to describe it as idolatrous.[1] We must go back to the Gospels if we wish to discover its real origin.

As Bossuet remarks, "all St. John's writings tend to reveal the Heart of Jesus, which contains in short all the mysteries of Christianity—mysteries of love having their origin in this Heart."[2]

After St. John, there have been many doctors and saints who, from age to age, have spoken of the Sacred Heart, sung its praises, and practised and advocated its cultus. It would be impossible to enumerate them all, especially in a work like the present, the size of which is limited. We can only mention a few names and add a few comments.

We can trace the gradual development in the writings of the earliest Fathers of what may be called the theology of the Sacred Heart. Very valuable evidence on this subject is supplied by Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, among the Latin Fathers, and by St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen, among the Greek. It will be enough to quote a famous passage from St. Augustine, the importance of which is proved by the fact that it has been included by the Church in the Office for the feast of the Sacred Heart.

[1] Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, I, p. 236.

[2] Bossuet: *Panégyrique de Saint Jean*, 3rd point.

The great doctor, commenting on the account given by St. John of the soldier who opened Our Lord's side with a lance, says: "It was with a definite purpose that the Evangelist used the word *aperuit* (opened); he did not say 'pierced' or 'wounded' or anything else, but he said 'opened,' as if to suggest that the gate of life was opened, whence the Sacraments of the Church should flow, without which there is no entrance to the life that is really life. The blood which was shed, was shed for the remission of sins; the water mingled with the life-giving stream is both a means of purification and a beverage."[1]

As Bougaud points out[2] this is not the only place where St. Augustine states and dwells upon "the great doctrine that from Our Lord's wounded side the Church was born, all the Sacraments proceed, and all light and love come to the souls of men; that the Heart of Jesus ought to be the shelter and refuge especially of those who need comfort, strength, or pardon."

Later on, in the Middle Ages, there are many references to this doctrine, breathing the most touching eloquence and tender piety. We find them in the writings of the most famous doctors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, men such as St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas. With these great masters of sacred science we must also mention St. Gertrude, one of the chief Christian mystics, who

[1] St. Augustine, *Tract.* 120 *in Joan.*

[2] *Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, ch. vii.

has been well designated "the theologian of the Sacred Heart."[1]

We have already noticed how she complained that St. John had told us nothing of the wonders revealed to him, when he rested his head on Our Lord's breast at the last supper. But may we not ask whether she had really any reason for envying him? Was not she likewise permitted to rest on the Sacred Heart, to learn its secrets, and to count its beats, some of which, as she says, writing at her Divine Master's bidding, effect the salvation of sinners, whilst others procure the sanctification of the just, all alike giving glory to God the Father and testifying to Our Lord's incomprehensible love of men?[2]

Yet in the Middle Ages devotion to the Sacred Heart was still not fully developed, and it went on growing and becoming more definite even before the great revelations at Paray. Many saintly souls contributed to its development, especially St. Teresa, St. Francis of Sales, with whom St. Margaret Mary was so closely connected, and St. John Eudes, who was her contemporary.[3]

Not only was a doctrine being gradually developed, but pious customs and practices of devotion were imperceptibly spreading, and the cultus was taking root and growing. Most of the doctors and mystics, of whom we have spoken, did more than write

[1] Gabriel Ledos: *Sainte Gertrude*, p. 163.

[2] *Revelationes*, ed. cit., I, pp. 144 and 187.

[3] On this subject *cf.* Languet, *op. cit.*, p. xlvii, etc., and M. Henri Joly, *Le Bienheureux Père Eudes*, p. 170, etc.

about the Sacred Heart of our Saviour; they prayed to it and honoured it by outward acts of piety. A striking instance of the anticipation of the cultus of the Sacred Heart is presented by Lanspergius, a Carthusian, who lived at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. We ought, perhaps, to have added his name to those whom we have called the theologians of the Sacred Heart, although what he has written on the subject is in no sense a dogmatic statement.[1]

We may regard it rather as the outpouring of a heart inspired with love of God, or the soaring of a mystic towards the sole object of his affections and thoughts. Prayers and praises also are included in these pious exercises (the word is used by the author himself) in honour of the adorable and beloved Heart of our Saviour.[2]

He exhorts us solemnly to follow his example and meditate upon the perfection and goodness of the Sacred Heart, to regard it as our aid in all our troubles, our refuge in every sorrow. Further —and it is here, I think, that we can distinctly recognize the cultus—he wishes us to keep a picture of the Sacred Heart in some conspicuous position,

[1] Justice and gratitude require us to say that our attention was drawn to these passages in Lanspergius' writings by Dom Couturier, subprior of the Abbey of Ligugé, which is now transferred to Chevetogne, in the Belgian Ardennes, where the sons of St. Benedict maintain their ancient reputation for learning and sanctity, to the great benefit of students and of their numerous visitors.

[2] *Exercitium ad piissimum et fidelissimum Cor Domini nostri Jesu Christi. D. Joannis Justi Lanspergii opera omnia, Monsterolii, Typis Cartusiæ S. Mariæ de Pratis*, 1898, t. v, p. 62

where we shall often see it, in order that we may frequently offer it our homage, and that the sight of it may quicken our love of God and impel us to copy the disposition and virtues of this most perfect Heart.[1]

Is it, then, correct to say that in the centuries preceding the revelations made to the Church through St. Margaret Mary, the cultus of the Sacred Heart existed only here and there, as a private devotion practised by some privileged individuals almost by stealth? We are certainly not justified in assuming this to have been the case.

It had long been held in honour in many communities and in several of the great religious Orders. We may mention first the Carthusian Order, to which Lanspergius belonged, then the Franciscans,[2] the Cistercians and the Dominicans. Special attention must be paid to the last named, as long before the great revelation of June, 1675, they had forestalled our Saviour's desire, and had been accustomed to keep the feast and say the Office of the "Wound in Our Lord's Side" on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, the very day now consecrated by the Church to the Feast of the Sacred Heart.[3]

[1] *Id., ibid.* *Cf.* t. iii, p. 298; t. iv, p. 138, etc.

[2] It is recorded that, on the feast of St. Francis, Our Lord showed St. Margaret Mary during her meditation the great saint of Assisi, as "one of the chief favourites of His Sacred Heart," assigning him to her "as her guide, in pledge of His Divine love" (*Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 281, etc.).

[3] On this subject see Bainvel, *La Dévotion au Sacré-Coeur de Jésus*, p. 231. This work contains what is probably the best account hitherto published of the antecedents of this devotion.

This Office contained special hymns, and the following lines might well find a place in our present liturgy:

Dulcis hasta, latus Dei
Te replevit sanguine;
Dulcis mucro per cor Dei,
Volvitur in flumine.
Sic salvantur omnes rei
Secreto Dei munere.

Our list would be unpardonably incomplete if we failed to mention one more Order—that, namely, in which the devotion to the Sacred Heart was destined to spring up and spread over the whole Catholic world. We have already mentioned St. Francis of Sales as one of the great and pious doctors of the Church, in whose writings there is a sort of anticipation of the revelations at Paray. Scattered up and down in his works and letters there are many passages revealing his ardent devotion to the Sacred Heart. He desired to teach his first daughters of the Visitation Order this devotion, and to make it their distinctive mark. One of his early biographers records of the holy Bishop of Geneva, how he liked to say that the nuns of the Visitation, being intended to practise especially gentleness and humility, the two virtues dearest to the Sacred Heart of the Word Incarnate, ought to have the incomparable grace and privilege of calling themselves the Daughters of the Heart of Jesus.[1]

Accordingly, when he had to choose armorial bearings for the religious family that he had just

[1] Dupuy: *Vie de Saint François de Sales*, part v, ch. i.

established, the saint was not at a loss. On June 10, 1611, only three days after the profession of the first nuns at Annecy, he wrote to St. Jane de Chantal as follows: "Last night God inspired me with the thought that by His grace our house of the Visitation is noble and stately enough to have armorial bearings, a coat of arms, a motto, and a war-cry. I think, dear Mother, with your consent, that we should adopt as our arms a heart pierced with two arrows and surrounded by a crown of thorns, this poor heart serving as a base for a cross rising above it, on which are engraved the sacred names of Jesus and Mary.

"My dear daughter, when I see you, I will tell you a number of little thoughts that have occurred to me on this subject, for our little congregation is indeed a work of the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Our dying Saviour gave birth to us through the opening of His Sacred Heart."[1]

The religious of the Visitation Order were honoured, therefore, with the title of "Daughters of the Sacred Heart," they had its representation as their coat of arms, and from their entrance into religion they studied the writings of St. Francis of Sales, who had so great a devotion to our Saviour's adorable Heart. We may be sure that they very soon paid it, not indeed public worship, for this was not yet sanctioned by the Church, but a private cultus, no less true and tender because it was almost unknown to others and peculiarly their own.

A study of the archives of the Order during the

1 *Œuvres de Saint François de Sales*, ed. Vivès, t. vii, p. 198.

first sixty years of its existence, both in France and in other countries, reveals many traces of such a cultus, but there is one house, the records of which afford no evidence of it, and it is a remarkable fact that this particular house is the one at Paray-le-Monial.[1] Does it not seem as if God had allowed this to be the case in order to prevent any purely human interpretation from being put upon St. Margaret Mary's mission? It might otherwise have been possible to say that she had derived the idea of the devotion, of which she became the apostle, from her surroundings, instead of being, as she really was, only the supernaturally inspired means of interpreting and carrying out our Saviour's desires.

In choosing Margaret Mary to help Him in His great work, God desired her to assist Him by her trials and sufferings, and it seems as though He would have feared to render her task too easy, if He had placed her in a community which was already favourable to the cultus of the Sacred Heart, and would no doubt have gladly welcomed its full development. He may have preferred to choose for her a convent where this devotion, hitherto unknown, was to be received at first with coldness and distrust, and considered a rash and dangerous innovation.

We have referred to what may be termed the preliminary steps, leading up to the establishment of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Occasionally they appear to approach it very closely, but there

[1] Bougaud, *op. cit.*, ch. viii.

was still much to be done. The devotion had been hitherto sporadic, practised only in religious houses and regarded as the exclusive privilege of a few chosen souls, but now it was destined to spread over the whole world and to be common to all the faithful.

Hitherto it could be referred to theologians or to supernatural communications made to various saints, but now it was to rest upon another foundation, on that, namely, of which Our Lord had said that it should sustain the Church, until the end of the world; it was to be recognized and sanctioned by the highest doctrinal authority on earth. This has been done most emphatically,[1] for the popes have attached many indulgences to the devotion and have censured those who have spoken against it. Moreover, on August 23, 1856, a memorable decree was issued, which not only authorized but prescribed the celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, thus giving it a place in the official liturgy of the Catholic Church; and one of the acts which will make posterity look back with gratitude to the reign of Leo XIII was the solemn consecration of the whole world to the adorable Heart of our Saviour. All this was not the work of a day, but of many years, more than two centuries; but the signal for it, and the impetus, were given

[1] We can only allude to these facts in a very cursory manner, but reference may be made to Cardinal Pie's eloquent and vigorous sermons, and especially to the Synodal Letter of December, 1857 (*Œuvres de l'Évêque de Poitiers*, III, p. 42, etc., and *l'Homélie du 14 Juin*, 1865; *ibid.*, t. v, p. 420, etc.).

between the months of December, 1673, and June, 1675; they proceeded from Jesus Christ Himself in the four great revelations described in this chapter.

Our Lord made use in this case of an instrument, as He usually does, and He chose His agent not among the famous Fathers and Doctors of the Church, nor among the learned religious, several of whom, in the seventeenth century, were so great an honour to their respective Orders, that their character and authority would have made their mission accredited, even by the most prejudiced. In the first of the great revelations, Our Divine Master spoke plainly on this point to Margaret Mary, saying: "I have chosen thee, as a very abyss of unworthiness and ignorance, for the accomplishment of this great design, in order that all may be done by Me."

He had acted likewise when calling His apostles; as Bossuet remarks: "He alone was free to choose as the instruments for His work, men who, far from seeming suitable, appeared likely to hinder His success, and He did this because He gave them all the virtue that could render them effective agents. In order that no one should ask whether He accomplished everything, it was expedient that He should take as His associates, men utterly incapable in themselves of carrying out the great designs that He intended to accomplish by their instrumentality."[1]

This is why Our Lord's choice fell on a young nun,

[1] Bossuet, *Panégyrique de S. André*, 1er point.

unknown outside her convent, and with no authority over her sisters, who mostly regarded her with suspicion because of the unusual character of her piety. We have now to see how she discharged her mission, and with what success.

CHAPTER VI

TRIALS AND OPPOSITION

AT the end of her supernatural conversations with Our Divine Lord, St. Margaret Mary was generally utterly prostrate, and for several hours or even a whole day she appeared unconscious, unable to do anything or even to utter a word. This was particularly the case after the first great revelation. She says herself: "After so great a favour I remained for several days in a state resembling intoxication, so completely beside myself as to be incapable of saying a word without violent exertion."[1]

She was taken to Mother de Saumaise, but was scarcely able to stammer a few words. "I was aware," she adds, "of such a plenitude of God, that I could not express myself to my Superior as I should have liked to do." What hindered her utterance and prevented her speaking was chiefly her profound humility and refinement of feeling. She longed to throw herself at her Sisters' feet and confess all her sins to them, and how could she, without doing violence to her feelings, allow them to see anything of the wonderful favours that she

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 380.

received from God, and of the special mission with which He had just entrusted her? She goes on to say: "It would have been a great comfort to me to make my general confession aloud in the refectory, so as to reveal the depths of corruption within me, in order that none of the graces which I received might be ascribed to me."

Her distress was excessive after the third revelation, when she had to deliver the message to Mother de Saumaise. On this occasion she could not be satisfied with saying a few more or less vague words; she had received definite orders from Our Lord, but before carrying them out she required the express authorization of her Superior. More than ever did she realize her inability to explain clearly what she had to do, and, when the vision was over, she was in such a state that she "no longer knew where she was."

Being unable to answer the questions put to her, and having great difficulty in even standing upright, she was taken, or rather carried, to Mother de Saumaise's cell, where her Superior "mortified and humiliated her with all her might, and allowed her to do none of the things that Our Lord had asked of her, treating with contempt all that the poor Sister had just said. . . . This," she adds, "consoled me very much, and I withdrew in great peace."[1]

Who can read these lines with dry eyes? What could be more touching, and what better proof could we have of the sanctity of our heroine and of the reality of her visions than this humility, which

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 383.

delights in suffering, mortification and scorn immediately after her descent from Thabor? Mother de Saumaise thought so, no doubt, herself. As we have said, she no longer cherished any prejudice against Margaret Mary or her extraordinary ways, and if, on the two occasions that we have mentioned, her former distrust seems to have revived and she treated the young nun with the same severity as in her noviciate, she was only displaying excessive prudence, which was perfectly justifiable, because the revelations were of exceptional importance. We may believe that she appreciated Margaret Mary most fully, but felt it her duty to submit her to a decisive test, and to force her, as it were, to reveal outwardly the graces and virtues that were hers.

This wise and clear-sighted Superior desired above all to have some sure proof of Margaret Mary's sanctity, and of the mission assigned her by God.

After so much emotion, Margaret Mary's health was seriously affected, and gave rise to great anxiety. She suffered from a violent intermittent fever that recurred every day for almost two months; but she concealed her illness as long as she could, until her strength was utterly exhausted, and she had to have recourse to Dr. William Billet, the medical attendant of the convent, who said that he had been called in too late, and could do nothing to save her. It was then that Mother de Saumaise, moved no doubt by feelings of compassion, and by the desire to retain one who was a treasure to the community, but in all probability still more by the

hope of obtaining from Heaven a miracle calculated to open the eyes of all and to reveal the goodness and sincerity of the dying Sister, ordered her to ask God to restore her to health. Margaret Mary obeyed, though it cost her much self-denial; for she loved suffering, and had for that reason so long concealed the fever undermining her strength. Her cure was instantaneous, and Languet tells us[1] that she was able at once to leave her bed, so that the community in amazement saw her walking about without any support, although in the morning she seemed to be at the point of death.

Her Superior said: "If God cures you, I will acknowledge by this token that all you experience comes from Him, and I will grant you permission to do what Our Lord enjoins in order to honour His Sacred Heart."

Mother de Saumaise kept her word, and from this time Margaret Mary was free to communicate on the first Friday of each month, and to get up always on Thursday night to make the hour's meditation required by her Divine Master.

Mother de Saumaise was not alone in at length recognizing the sanctity of this soul, with regard to which she had hitherto hesitated to pronounce any opinion. The voice of God had spoken clearly, and some of the community began to do full justice to Margaret Mary, who became about this time an object of tender veneration to some of the most affectionate and interesting members of the large household governed by Mother de Saumaise.

[1] *La Vie de la Vénérable Mère Marguerite-Marie*, IV, p. 123.

Margaret Mary was no longer employed in the infirmary, but was mistress in the boarding-school, or, to be more precise, of the "young Sisters of the little habit."[1]

No sooner had her pupils learnt to know her than they were filled with such love and respect for her that forty years later, when the Process was begun in 1715, these feelings were as intense as they had been years before. They spoke of her usually as "the saint," and her spirit of prayer, recollection and mortification, leading her to do things such as we read of in the lives of the saints, although the world shrinks from them with horror, made a deep impression upon these simple, pious children; whilst the humility with which she not only endured with patience, but welcomed with joy, the most insulting words and actions, aroused their most intense admiration.

We have already quoted part of the deposition made by Marie Chevalier de Montrouan, one of these children, in 1715. She describes how she used to watch for opportunities of seeing St. Margaret Mary at prayer, and then she would run to call her companions "to see how their saint prayed to God." The latest biographer of St. Margaret Mary[2] remarks that an angel from heaven could not have inspired this little group of children with more veneration than did humble Sister Alacoque. All the pictures and rosaries that they received from their beloved mistress as gifts or

[1] See note in Chapter III, p. 80.

[2] *Vie*, publiée par le Monastère de Paray, p. 88.

rewards were treasured like precious relics. Several times they begged her to give them some of her hair when it was cut. It is easy to understand that these children must have been filled with sorrow and amazement, when they heard others speak ill of her, or saw them treat her in their presence as a hypocrite or a visionary.

Margaret Mary's trials were far from being at an end. We have said that, after her miraculous recovery, some members of the Paray community began to regard her with favour, but there were others who continued to oppose her, and refused to abandon the attitude of suspicion that they had assumed with regard to her, as soon as they became aware of the unusual manner in which it pleased God to deal with her, and their coldness gradually developed into real hostility.

Margaret Mary was far from complaining; she was not even surprised at their behaviour towards her. Had not her Divine Master called her, and had she not consented to be the victim of the Sacred Heart? This great and glorious task had been again imposed upon her in one of the numerous visions that she describes in detail and in a charming manner. Our Lord appeared to her frequently, sometimes to reprove her for her faults, sometimes to encourage and sustain her in the assaults of the devil, or in the persecution that she underwent at the hands of her sisters. On the First Friday of each month the Sacred Heart was shown her "like a sun glowing with brilliant light." "Its rays," she says, "went straight to my heart, which

felt at first inflamed with a fire so intense that it seemed ready to burn me to ashes." There was one spot where she received peculiar blessings and the most signal graces. This was a little court-yard beside the nuns' choir, and she liked to visit it because she was then close to the Blessed Sacrament. A very wonderful scene took place there, in memory of which the nuns at Paray still call this yard "the court of the Seraphim." The following is St. Margaret Mary's own account of the event.[1]

"One day," she says, "when we were working in common at the hemp, I withdrew to a little corner to be nearer to the Blessed Sacrament. God used to show me great favours there. . . . As I knelt at my work, I felt at first quite recollected internally and externally. The adorable Heart of my Jesus was before me, more brilliant than the sun. It was in the midst of flames of pure love, and surrounded by seraphim singing: 'Love triumphs, love exults, the love of the Sacred Heart gives gladness.' These blessed spirits invited me to join them in praising this loving Heart, but I dared not do so. They told me that they had come to unite with me in offering it perpetual homage of love, adoration, and praise, and that they would take my place before the Blessed Sacrament, so that, by their agency, I might love it without interruption, and, on the other hand, they would share my suffering love, just as I should rejoice in them. Thenceforth," she adds, "whenever I

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 107, etc.

prayed to the angels, I called them my 'divine colleagues.'"

In another account of the same vision, she modifies somewhat the words of the seraphim, and explains perhaps more clearly the part of each in the contract that they proposed to make with her. "They told me," she says, "that if I were willing to ally myself with them, they would receive me; but I must begin to live their life, in which they would assist me as far as they could, and would make up for my inability to offer to Jesus Christ the homage that He desired of me, and that in return I must make up for their inability to suffer, so that in this way we should unite love suffering with love exultant."

Margaret Mary was thus doubly pledged to her office of victim, both by the promise that she had already made to Our Lord, and by the compact that she had just concluded with her "divine colleagues." She was soon to have an opportunity of proving herself a victim of the Sacred Heart in a very painful way.

As if she had not been thoroughly convinced by Margaret Mary's miraculous recovery, Mother de Saumaise suddenly determined to have her examined by theologians, and ordered her to disclose without any reservation all her experiences, and especially the communications that she had received from Our Lord, regarding the establishment of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. The worthy superior had no intention of distressing Margaret Mary, but, being of a very timid nature, she felt some scruple in

keeping to herself secrets of such importance, and also questioned her own ability to guide a soul whose intercourse with God was of so extraordinary a nature.

It is possible, too, that she hoped the judges selected, whom she no doubt was justified in considering competent, would decide the matter favourably for Margaret Mary, thus putting an end, once for all, to the persecution to which she was subjected. Unhappily the result was quite different from what she might reasonably have expected.

Who were the theologians to whom Mother de Saumaise had recourse? Margaret Mary's contemporaries only tell us that they were "men of learning"; but their want of insight and the vulgarity of their language scarcely justify this description. Languet says: "These men, having very little experience in spiritual matters, judged like most people in the world, that is to say, they condemned without examination all that appeared miraculous, unusual or supernatural. . . . Such were the directors in this little town, men with no deep knowledge of God's mysteries and grace. As soon as the Sister told them anything, they were prejudiced against her; they shook their heads and, regarding her as a visionary, ordered her to be made to eat soup."[1]

What must have been Margaret Mary's feelings when she heard the strange sentence that her judges had passed upon her? Even if she had told us nothing, we could easily guess her anguish of mind,

[1] *La Vie de la Vénérable Mère Marguerite-Marie*, p. 124.

for she was convinced that all her experiences came from God, and, on the other hand, she knew that she could not please Him unless she obeyed those whose duty it was to direct her. However, she has herself given us an account of the torture that she underwent, being unable to choose between the duty of obedience, which she valued too highly ever to set it aside, and her inward feelings, that were stronger than herself, and then, more than ever, overpowered her soul. She says: "I did my utmost to resist these tendencies, believing firmly that I was in error; but, being unable to succeed, I concluded that God had abandoned me, for I was told that I was not governed by His Spirit, and yet it was impossible for me to resist this spirit."[1]

Happily this torture was not of long duration. Some time previously, Our Lord, wishing to comfort and encourage her in her trials, had promised to send her one of His servants, to whom she was to disclose all the treasures and secrets of His Sacred Heart, and who would console her on her way. The time was very near when this promise was to be fulfilled.

Early in the year 1675, Father Claude de la Colombière, being then thirty-six years of age, came to Paray, to be Superior of the Jesuits there. He had a great and well-earned reputation for learning and talents, and he possessed unusually distinguished manners and remarkable virtues, When quite young, whilst still a student of theology at the college of Clermont, in Paris, he was chosen

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 112.

by his superiors to act as tutor to Colbert's two sons. The famous minister soon came to regard him as a friend, and invited him, whenever he could, to his country house at Sceaux. There, in the midst of people of the highest rank, and men eminent for their literary and artistic achievements, he was conspicuous for the elegance of his wit, the charm of his conversation, and the ease of his manners; in short, to his many other advantages he added the finished polish that characterizes a man of more than usual merit.

Patru esteemed him highly and liked to consult him on points of language and style, so that for many years he kept up a correspondence with him, which shows what confidence he had in his opinions and taste.

Not long afterwards, Father de la Colombière became famous as a preacher, for his sermons were full of eloquence, learning, and piety. Above all, however, he was a holy religious, and when he came to Paray, he had just completed his three years' probation, and had made his solemn profession, after a retreat lasting thirty days. In the Journal in which he kept notes of his thoughts and resolutions, we can trace, at least partially, the effect upon his life of the last year of recollection and trial, and especially of his retreat. He made a vow to observe faithfully all the rules and regulations of the Society of Jesus, not only those compelling a religious to conform to the life of his community (which he cannot do without gaining many victories over nature), but also those that

have a higher aim, and seek to detach a soul from itself, and give it over to the holy folly of the Cross without any reservation.

Those who lived with him bear testimony that they never saw him break his promise even in the smallest matter. In spite of his deep humility, he could not help attracting the attention of all who saw and heard him, nor could he conceal the spirit that governed him, for it was betrayed by all his words, actions and behaviour. His mere presence was a living sermon inspiring thoughts of piety and virtue.[1]

Such was the reputation of this great and holy man. When he was sent to Paray, people in the world must certainly have considered that he was too good a man for the post. Mlle. de Lyonne, a member of the highest nobility in the country, who soon afterwards, acting on the advice, or rather under the orders of Father de la Colombière, entered the Visitation Convent at Paray, and there formed a holy and supernatural friendship with Margaret Mary, was one day expressing her surprise at this appointment to one of the Fathers at Paray, and asked him why a man of such merit and talents had been buried alive in so insignificant a town. The good priest replied: "It was for the sake of a particular soul that needed his guidance."[1]

In most towns containing both a house of the Society of Jesus and a Visitation Convent, it was

[1] *Cf.* Daniel, *Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, ch. vii, pp. 131-133.

[2] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 126.

usual for the Superior of the Jesuits to act as extraordinary confessor to the Sisters. Father de la Colombière's predecessors at Paray had successively held this office, which now fell to his lot. Accordingly, a few days after his arrival, he went to call upon Mother de Saumaise, who, wishing to present him to all the community, summoned all the Sisters to the parlour. As soon as Sister Alacoque entered, she heard a voice within her saying: "This is the helper whom I am sending to thee."[1]

Shortly afterwards he was invited to preach in the convent chapel, and on this occasion it was his turn to feel a sort of presentiment of what was about to happen, and of his future relations with Margaret Mary. Whilst speaking in front of the grille of the nun's choir, he noticed her attitude and attention, for she seemed unable to look elsewhere. After the instruction he asked the Superior to tell him the name of the Sister who appeared to be so recollected and united with God.

Mother de Saumaise knew of the promise made by Our Lord to send Margaret Mary a director chosen by Himself, and although she had not received any special revelation on the subject, she was convinced that this director was Father de la Colombière. There can be no doubt, therefore, that she confided to him all the extraordinary graces with which God had favoured this Sister. At any rate, when he came to hear the confessions of the community during the next Ember week, he showed himself aware of Margaret Mary's spiritual condi-

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 403.

tion, and, as she says in her autobiography, "Without our ever having seen each other, he spoke to me as if he understood all that was going on within me."[1]

At this first confession, although he seemed to invite her to do so, she did not, however, confide to him anything regarding her intimacy with her Divine Spouse, nor the revelations of the Sacred Heart. Her chief anxiety appeared to be to avoid offending her Sisters by remaining longer in the confessional than they did, and her confessor, perceiving this fear, asked her if she would return to the same place later on, and speak with him more at leisure; but, as she records herself, "my timid nature, dreading all these communications, made me reply that I was not my own mistress, but would do whatever was required of me by obedience."

Here, however, her Superior came to her assistance, and ordered her to reveal everything frankly to Father de la Colombière, for she was unwilling to let her suffer any longer through the failure on the part of the unintelligent "theologians" to understand her difficulties.

St. Margaret Mary obeyed, though she felt intolerable repugnance to speaking to Father de la Colombière, as she told him when, a few days later, he came to the convent on purpose to hear her confession. "He replied," she says, "that he was glad to have given me an opportunity of making a sacrifice for God's sake. Then, without any formality, I opened my heart to him and revealed

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 403.

to him all my soul, the evil as well as the good. After which he comforted me greatly, assuring me that I had nothing to fear under the guidance of this spirit, as long as it did not stand in the way of obedience; that I ought to follow its prompting and abandon myself to it, so as to sacrifice myself and offer myself up according to its good pleasure. He marvelled at the goodness of God in not being repelled by so much opposition, and he taught me how to value God's gifts, and to receive with reverence the frequent communications and familiar intercourse with which I was favoured."[1]

Thenceforth, if the expression is permissible, the ice was broken, and until Father de la Colombière's death the spiritual friendship between these two chosen souls continued without interruption. They imparted their lights and graces to one another, and more than once the director allowed himself to be enlightened and guided by the penitent. They shared a work in which both were deeply interested, and we may say that from this time onwards Father de la Colombière did as much as Margaret Mary herself towards establishing and spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Our Lord was not slow in manifesting His will in the matter. We read in Margaret Mary's autobiography that once when Father de la Colombière went to say Mass in the convent chapel, great graces were bestowed upon him as well as upon herself. "For when," she says, "I went up to receive Holy Communion, our Saviour showed me

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 403.

His Sacred Heart like a glowing furnace, together with two other hearts drawing near and ready to plunge into it, and He said: 'It is thus that My pure love unites these three hearts for ever.' Afterwards He made me understand that this union was all for the glory of His Sacred Heart, and that He desired me to make known the treasures of it to Father de la Colombière, that he might publish abroad their priceless worth. For this purpose He wished us to be like brother and sister, equally endowed with spiritual gifts. I represented to Him my poverty and the difference that there was between a man of great virtue and merit and a poor wretched sinner like myself, and He said: 'The infinite riches of My Heart will fill up and equalize everything, only speak to him fearlessly.'"[1]

Not long after this vision, the fourth and last of the great revelations of the Sacred Heart took place. It was the most important and decisive of all, and St. Margaret Mary must certainly have communicated it at once to her new director, the brother of her soul.

In the beautiful vision that we have just been considering, Our Lord showed her plainly that, by uniting thus His Heart with the hearts of His disciple and of His servant, He wished them thenceforth to impart to one another all the lights and graces granted to each individually; but in the great revelation of June, 1675, He told her in the clearest terms to inform Father de la Colombière at once of all that she had just heard.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 404, etc.

Scarcely had our Divine Master expressed the wish that a feast should be established in the Church by her agency, so as to give peculiar honour to the Sacred Heart, when she exclaimed: "But, Lord, to whom art Thou speaking?"—"Poor, foolish child that thou art," replied our Saviour, "knowest thou not that I make use of the weak to confound the strong, and that as a rule I reveal My power more particularly in dealing with the poor and humble in spirit, so that they may ascribe nothing to themselves?" Then, after another interruption on Margaret Mary's part, He added: "Speak to My servant and bid him from Me to do his utmost to establish this devotion and give pleasure to My Divine Heart. Let him never be discouraged by the difficulties that he will encounter, many though they may be; he ought to know that one who entirely distrusts himself and trusts solely in Me is all-powerful." [1]

In obedience to her Divine Master's orders, St. Margaret Mary on coming out of her ecstasy went to Mother de Saumaise, and told her all that Our Lord had said, asking permission at the same time to communicate everything to Father de la Colombière.

The prudent Superior dared not refuse anything to one whom she was inclined more and more to regard as a saint, and Margaret Mary joyfully repeated to her director all the complaints, wishes, and promises of our Divine Lord. This took place, as we saw in the preceding chapter, on one

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 124.

of the days within the octave of Corpus Christi, in 1675. On Friday, June 21, the day after the octave, Father de la Colombière, wishing to be the first to comply with Our Lord's request, dedicated himself solemnly to the Sacred Heart.

More than three months had passed since his initiation into St. Margaret Mary's secrets, and all his contemporaries describe him as a man of calm and deliberate judgment, never taking up a cause nor expressing an opinion without full knowledge of the facts and after careful reflection. He did not act lightly when he took the solemn step of dedicating himself and all his works to the Sacred Heart, on the very day when the feast in honour of it was subsequently to be celebrated by the Church. In this way he became its first conquest, and, jointly with Margaret Mary, its first disciple and apostle. It was not enough for him to adopt the new devotion; from that day he lost no opportunity of making it known to others, and during the short time that still remained to him at Paray, he was zealous in commending it to those placed under his care.

It would be natural to suppose that the opinion of such a man under such conditions ought to have made a deep impression upon Margaret Mary's companions, and to have won over those who hitherto had spared her neither the most unjust suspicions nor the most bitter criticism.

Nothing of the sort occurred; her enemies even increased the malicious charges and the mortifying actions that caused her so much distress. According

to them, she was nothing but a hypocrite, a visionary, and almost a mad woman. After deceiving the Mother Superior (as they said), she had succeeded in deluding Father de la Colombière and in making him share her dangerous errors. Some went even so far as to treat her as one possessed, and never met her without throwing a drop of holy water at her.

In her humility she allowed them to say and do whatever they chose, and she never complained, having many other things to endure. The reader will remember the pain in her side, that kind of invisible wound, which, after the first great revelation, continued to cause a burning pain in her breast at the spot where Our Lord had appeared to open it, in order to withdraw her heart and plunge it into His own. Sometimes the agony was so intense that the poor Sister could not conceal it, in spite of her desire to suffer silently with Christ on the cross. She could not digest any food, and was in a state either of complete exhaustion or of great agitation. All sorts of remedies were tried without success, for, as Our Lord had foretold, only bleeding availed to give her any relief. From time to time she asked for this remedy out of obedience to God ; but by doing so she drew down upon herself fresh humiliations and moral sufferings that were harder to bear than the burning pain. The infirmarians were much displeased at her having to be bled so often, and, as the doctor doubted its being good for her, they fancied that in seeking this remedy she was yielding to some whim and

caprice, and so they tried other treatment that only served to aggravate her suffering.

For some time she was sustained and comforted amidst all her bodily and mental trials by the encouragement and advice of Father de la Colombière, but she was not to have him near her for long. At the end of September, 1676, he left Paray for England, as his superiors were sending him to London as chaplain to the Duchess of York, Mary Beatrice d'Este, a Catholic princess, who was the wife of the heir to the English throne. Being thus suddenly transferred to a strange country, he seems to have had considerable difficulty in accustoming himself to it, for six weeks after leaving Paray, he wrote rather sadly to Mother de Saumaise: "There are no Daughters of Holy Mary here, and still less is there a Sister Alacoque." A year later, however, the nuns at Paray may have been disposed to envy him, for by means of his talents, goodness and zeal he had succeeded in doing a great work in what had formerly been the island of saints; he had effected many conversions and induced many to adopt the devotion to the Sacred Heart, when suddenly he heard that a terrible storm had burst out at Paray, affecting especially St. Margaret Mary. He therefore wrote to Mother de Saumaise saying: "I am writing to assure you of my grief at what is going on. . . . What a disaster it will be if, whilst Our Lord is blessing my labours here, the enemy of our salvation is destroying elsewhere what, by the mercy of God, I had the happiness of establishing."

What had happened at Paray?

The enemy, who succeeds only too well in sowing cockle amidst the good grain, had preserved in the hearts of some of the nuns those feelings of distrust and animosity which they had so often displayed towards Sister Alacoque. The spirit of charity and harmony that ought to prevail in every well-regulated religious house had suffered much in consequence. It would not be correct to say that the convent at Paray was disorderly, nor that the rule had ceased to be observed, but there was no longer that unanimity of thought and feeling which makes a community like a family, all the members of which have but one heart and mind. Moreover, piety and recollection must inevitably decay where there are divisions and discord.

Towards the close of the year 1677 Margaret Mary reminded Our Lord of all that He had done to win the hearts of men, who, as a rule, offered Him in return nothing but insults and refusals. Having done so, she heard Him say: "It is true, My child, that My love induced Me to sacrifice everything for them, without their making Me any return; but I wish you to make good their ingratitude, through the merits of My Sacred Heart. I desire to give you My Heart, but first you must become its sacrificial victim, in order that by its assistance you may avert the chastisement that My Father's Divine justice, now that He is armed with wrath, is about to bring upon a religious community that He intends to rebuke and correct in His just anger."[1]

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 394.

At these words the poor Sister was overpowered, and besought Our Lord to remove the chalice that He was offering her. She may have acted thus through human weakness; but it was probably her intense humility that made her believe herself unworthy to be an expiatory victim, either because she could not unaided make any sufficient reparation to God for the insults offered Him, or because she could not undertake to compensate for the wrongs committed by those who, though guilty, were in her opinion infinitely purer and better than herself.

Her humility made her accuse herself of cowardice, and she writes: "Our Lord having shown me all that I should have to suffer to appease His just anger, my whole being rose in revolt, and I had not the courage to sacrifice myself." Without going so far as absolutely to refuse what was required of her, she tried to gain time, and continues: "I said that, not being my own mistress, I could not do it except under obedience, and my fear of being ordered to do this prevented me from mentioning it; but He urged me incessantly and left me no peace. I burst into tears, and felt at last constrained to tell my Superior, who, seeing my perplexity, told me to sacrifice myself, and do whatever He asked of me, without any reservation. But my trouble was greatly increased then, for I had not the courage to consent, but went on resisting."

The insight that we have gained into her character, and our knowledge of her refinement and generosity, will enable us to appreciate the agony caused by this resistance.

The Feast of the Presentation was approaching, on the morning of which the Visitation nuns always renew their vows solemnly. On the preceding day St. Margaret Mary tells us: "God's justice appeared to me armed in so terrible a manner that I was beside myself, and was unable to defend myself, when a voice said to me, as to St. Paul: 'It is hard for thee to kick against the goad of My justice. Since thou hast offered Me so much resistance in order to escape the humiliations that thou wilt suffer through this sacrifice, I will double them, for I asked of thee only a secret sacrifice; but now I desire it to be public, and to be made at a time and in a manner beyond all human reasoning, and accompanied by such humiliating circumstances that they will be a source of shame to thee all the rest of thy life, both in thyself and before thy fellow-creatures, to make thee understand what it is to resist God.'"[1]

It was not, then, only in secret, in the silence of her cell, alone with her Saviour, that she was to implore His mercy on behalf of her Sisters and offer herself up in expiation of their faults. She was to declare publicly, before all her companions, that God had chosen her, a young nun, professed scarcely five years, to make reparation for the faults of the whole community—faults of which this very declaration would be a denunciation, uttered before a venerable assembly composed for the most part of women superior to herself in rank and talents, who had been much longer in religion,

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 395.

and who, in her own opinion, far surpassed her in sanctity. She had to suffer suspicion to rest upon each one of them, for, as she mentioned none by name, she seemed to include all in her accusations.

Whatever it might cost her to do God's will, she was bound to obey, and before that very day, November 20, 1677, was over, Margaret Mary offered the sacrifice required by her Divine Master, since she could no longer avoid or postpone it. She gives us the story as follows:

"After the evening meditation I could not go out with the others, but remained in the choir weeping and groaning until the last bell rang for supper. I went then to take my collation, for it was the eve of the Presentation, and having dragged myself by main force to the community, I felt myself so strongly urged to make this sacrifice aloud, in the way God showed me that He desired it to be made, that I was constrained to go to my Superior, who was ill just then. But I confess that I was so completely beside myself that I regarded myself as one bound hand and foot, able to do nothing freely, either inwardly or outwardly, except shed tears in abundance, which I did, thinking them the only way of expressing what I suffered; for I saw myself as the greatest criminal in the world, dragged by ropes to my place of execution. I beheld God's sanctity, armed with the thunderbolts of His just anger, and ready to hurl them and plunge me, as it seemed, into the gaping jaws of hell that I saw ready to engulf me. I felt myself burning with a devouring fire that penetrated to the marrow of my

bones, and all my body shook with a strange trembling, and I could say nothing except 'My God, have mercy upon me, according to the magnitude of Thy mercies!' All the rest of the time I was groaning under the weight of my sorrow, and unable to find any way of going to my Superior until nearly eight o'clock, when a Sister found me and took me to her. She was much surprised to see me in this state, that I could not then account for, but I fancied —and the thought added to my suffering—that any one seeing me would know what was amiss, although this was not the case. My Superior, knowing that obedience alone had any power over the spirit that kept me in that condition, ordered me to tell her what was distressing me; and then I told her at once about the sacrifice that God wished me to make of my whole being in the presence of the community, and the reason why He required it, which I shall not record for fear of offending against holy charity, and at the same time against the Heart of Jesus Christ, in which this precious virtue has its origin. This is why He is unwilling for us to offend against charity ever so little under any pretext whatever. Finally, having said and done what my Lord desired of me, I found myself criticized and judged in various ways; but I leave all concerning myself to God's mercy. I can assert, I think, that I had never suffered so much, not even if I could gather together all the sufferings endured previously and all those endured since. Even if all collectively had continued until my death, they would not seem comparable to what I underwent during that

night with which Our Lord chose to favour His wretched slave, in honour of the sorrowful night of His Passion, although mine was but a mere sample of His agony."[1]

We have given St. Margaret Mary's account of the matter in full; in spite of the omissions in it, due to her scrupulous charity, which prevent our following the course of events in detail, no other report, however full and exact, would reveal so plainly her emotions and agony during this terrible evening. Most of the details omitted can be supplied, thanks to the researches and conjectures of earlier writers on the subject, and especially of Languet, who was able to question several Sisters, eye-witnesses of the whole occurrence, and who certainly must have induced them to tell him all that they remembered of it. We are probably justified in thinking that the following is an accurate account of what happened:

It was about a quarter to six, and the evening meditation was just over, during which our Divine Lord had spoken to Margaret Mary, reproaching and warning her, as she has recorded. Being in a state of most violent agitation, and having her face bathed with tears, she dared not leave the choir with the other Sisters, but stayed there alone until the last bell rang for supper—that is to say, until almost six o'clock. Rising then with some difficulty, she went to the refectory, and after collation—it was a fast day, because of the feast on the morrow—she dragged herself to the community-room where

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 395, etc.

the Sisters were assembling. During the short retreats preceding the more solemn festivals, instead of the evening recreation there is a more serious assembly, where the Sisters, though sitting at needlework, are expected to discuss devotional matters, or to give an account of what they have been reading.[1]

For a few minutes Sister Alacoque remained with her companions, trying to control herself, and she succeeded at first in concealing her emotion. Soon, however, she felt God urging her on to action in a more irresistible way than ever before. Suddenly, hardly knowing what she was doing, she left the room, and almost mechanically went towards the Mother Superior's cell, for the latter was ill and had not left her room for some days. To reach it, Margaret Mary had to go down about ten steps and along a corridor, where she stopped bewildered, not daring to go a step further. She was still there, as she tells us, towards eight o'clock, when a Sister, who happened to pass, took pity upon her and led her, or rather dragged her, to Mother de Saumaise. The Superior soon understood the state of affairs, and speaking with a promptitude and decision that show her to have been enlightened from on high, she not only permitted, but ordered the poor victim to obey the voice that she had heard and to accomplish her sacrifice.

Margaret Mary went back to the community-room and entered at the moment when Mother

[1] Hamon: *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 220; *cf. Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, publiée par le Monastère de Paray-le-Monial, p. 138.

Assistant, acting instead of the Superior, was on the point of closing the assembly by asking the usual question: "Have your charities anything to say?" After which any religious, wishing to point out a defect or failure in duty on the part of her companions, might do so in all simplicity, kneeling, and having obtained permission. Accordingly, as soon as Mother Assistant had uttered the usual words, St. Margaret Mary asked leave to speak, and then, in the presence of all the Sisters seated in a row round the room in appalling silence, she knelt down, and—to use her own expression—said and did what her Lord required of her.

She gives us some idea of the storm that broke out immediately when she says that the collective sufferings of her whole life, both before and after this terrible scene, could never equal what she endured that night when Our Lord "chose to favour her with a little sample of the sorrowful night of His own Passion."

A more detailed and vivid account of the scene is given by Languet in the following passage, in which he describes the agitation and excitement prevailing among the community in the days that followed, although the disturbance certainly began in the room where Margaret Mary made her strange statements, as soon as she had ceased speaking: "They wondered," he says, "what was the cause of God's anger and of the sacrifice required of His servant, and hasty conjectures were formed. Some declared that this alleged vision was an insult to the house and to the whole Order; others that the Sister

was excessively proud to fancy that she could sacrifice herself for the salvation of others. Some said that she was absolutely wanting in charity, and others in prudence. They questioned, mocked, blamed, and ridiculed her; they found fault with some who out of compassion tried to defend her. 'Were we not right,' exclaimed several, 'in regarding her always as a visionary, telling us her dreams as if they were revelations?' The most charitable knew not what to say or think of so extraordinary a proceeding. Some asserted that it was a pity that she had gone mad; others persisted in believing seriously that she was possessed and must be exorcised, and so they piously sprinkled her with holy water."[1]

However infuriated most of her companions were against the poor Sister, they were soon forced to be silent. Matins began at half-past eight, and we may hope that during the Psalms and Lessons the feelings of anger abated; but very probably they revived when, at the end of the Office, the Mother Assistant received a message from the Superior which she was to communicate at once to the Sisters, and which laid upon each one the duty of taking the discipline before going to rest, in order to avert God's just anger from their convent.

On the next morning St. Margaret Mary was still suffering from the emotion of the preceding evening, which had not in her case subsided during the night, when, during Holy Mass, she heard these words in the depths of her soul: "At last peace is

[1] Languet, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

made, and My sanctity of justice is satisfied with the sacrifice that thou hast offered to Me."[1]

Over and above the satisfaction so generously offered to God's justice by His chosen victim, we may believe Him to have been disposed to pardon the guilty, because they appear to have examined their own consciences, and repented so genuinely that before the solemn renewal of their vows they had recourse to the Sacrament of Penance, and, according to a tradition still existing at Paray, on the morning of November 21, 1677, there were not enough confessors to satisfy all the religious who desired the grace of absolution.

Peace was made, therefore, with God. Was a real and durable peace concluded also between St. Margaret Mary and all her Sisters? Unhappily we cannot believe that such was the case, for, apart from Languet's significant words that we have already quoted, there is abundant testimony to show that for the next eight or ten years Margaret Mary suffered constantly from cavilling and persecution in the very convent of which she was destined to be the chief glory.

A circumstance that tended to render her trials, for a time at least, keener and harder to bear, was that she was about to lose her second, and we may almost say her last, human helper, in the person of Mother de Saumaise, whose departure renewed the grief and apprehension that she had felt when Father de la Colombière left Paray. Mother de Saumaise had been Superior for six years, and was

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 397.

bound by the rule of the Order to retire from office. She left Paray-le-Monial just after Ascension Day in 1678, and her place was taken by Mother Péronne-Rosalie Greyfié, who was one of the most notable members of the Visitation Order. She was born at Annecy in 1638, and had there known St. Jane de Chantal, who had more than once blessed her. When twelve years old she went as a boarder to the Visitation Convent in her native town, and received the "little habit" a week after her arrival. She regarded herself as belonging altogether to God from the day of her entrance into the convent, and therefore it seemed quite natural that, on finishing her education, she should pass from the boarding-school to the noviciate, to which she easily obtained admission. She was not quite seventeen at the time of her profession. Although she was still comparatively young when she succeeded Mother de Saumaise at Paray in the spring of 1678, she had already been Superior at Thonon, and mistress of novices at Annecy.

The Sisters of Paray wrote to Mother de Monthoux, who was then governing the convent at Annecy, expressing their wish that she should send her to them as their new Superior, and her answer was as follows: "My dear Sisters, it is a real sacrifice and loss to myself to grant your request and send you my most honoured Sister, the ex-Superior of Thonon, who is now our good mistress of novices. She is a woman of high character, possessing in perfection the spirit of strength and sweetness necessary to her government; she is

upright and sincere, perfectly humble, and very exact in the observance of the rule. In short, dear Sisters, unless I loved Paray as I do, I should not part from a Mother, with whom I am convinced you will be fully satisfied."[1]

Mother de Monthoux was not mistaken, for in a biographical note added to the accounts given by Margaret Mary's contemporaries, and compiled from the archives at Paray and the traditions of the convent, we read that "during the six years when Mother Greyfié was Superior, our Lord visibly blessed this house to its spiritual as well as to its temporal advantage."[2]

During this period St. Margaret Mary alternately received great graces and underwent great trials. The latter came upon her in the first instance from her new Superior. Of the two qualities ascribed by Mother de Monthoux to Mother Greyfié, her strength of character revealed itself more than her sweetness at the beginning of her term of office, especially in her dealings with Margaret Mary. She seems to acknowledge this herself, for in a memorandum that she compiled a year after Sister Alacoque's death, and addressed to Mother de Lévy-Châteaumorand, then Superior at Paray, she says: "When I arrived in the service of your house, although the community was very good, and full of piety and virtue, I nevertheless found opinions much divided on the subject of this true spouse of our crucified Saviour, and feeling myself inexperienced and unable alone to guide her along

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 148. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 476.

such extraordinary paths, I relied a little, or rather very much, upon her assurances that Our Lord would make me act according to His will in regard to her, so that I fearlessly followed my natural tendency to aim at peace and tranquillity; and in order to secure this, I hardly ever appeared to pay attention to the wonderful experiences of her soul. I never let her see anyone either belonging to the convent or from outside. If it happened that she did anything to arouse displeasure, even though it was by my order or with my permission, I allowed her to be blamed, and I found fault with her myself when it occurred in her presence." [1]

The first trial that Margaret Mary suffered at the hands of her new Superior was being deprived of her hour's meditation on Thursday night in each week. It is true that her Superior was soon enlightened by a painful event, in which God's action seemed clearly to be seen, and removed the prohibition, to which Margaret Mary had submitted without a word of protest, although she was intensely grieved at being obliged to refuse her Divine Master what He had expressly asked. Mother Greyfié gives the following account of the matter in the memorandum already mentioned: "I do not know whether you are aware that she was accustomed before my arrival to spend an hour in meditation during the night between Thursday and Friday. She used to begin it after Matins, and remain until eleven o'clock, lying prostrate, with her face against the ground, and her arms crossed. When her sufferings

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 152.

were greater than usual, I made her change this posture, and kneel with her hands clasped, or her arms crossed over her breast. At first I even wished to make her give up this practice altogether, and she obeyed the order that I gave her; but during this time when her hour of meditation was interrupted, she used often to come to me in a timid way to tell me that she thought Our Lord was annoyed with me on account of my prohibition, and that she was afraid He might punish me for it in some vexatious and painful manner. I did not, however, at once withdraw it; but seeing Sister Carré die suddenly of dysentery, from which no one else in the convent suffered, and feeling also other troubles connected with the death of so good a Sister, I made haste to restore her hour's meditation to Sister Alacoque, for I could not banish the thought that this was the punishment with which she had threatened me on our Saviour's part."[1]

However much Margaret Mary suffered at this time from her fellow-creatures, the most cruel torments that she endured proceeded from the devil. In her autobiography she says: "I underwent at that time violent attacks of the devil, who tempted me particularly to despair; pointing out that so wretched a being as myself ought not to claim a place in Paradise, since I had no share at all in God's love, of which I should be deprived for all eternity. This thought made me shed many tears. On other occasions he tempted me to vainglory and to gluttony, making me feel intolerable hunger, and

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 152.

then he suggested to me everything capable of satisfying the appetite, doing this particularly at the time of my spiritual exercises, thus causing me a strange torture. This hunger lasted until I went to the refectory to a meal, when I used to feel such disgust at the sight of food, that I had to force myself violently to take even a little; yet as soon as I rose from the table, my hunger returned worse than ever."[1]

There was, however, one virtue which God had not suffered the devil to assail, although He permitted him to wage war upon His servant. This was the virtue of purity, justly termed the "holy virtue," and it shone so brightly in this pure soul that the angels deemed it worthy to enter into alliance with them, and to join them in honouring the Sacred Heart. But a day came, as we stated in the first chapter, when God allowed Margaret Mary to be entrusted with the task of expiating the vices of the King of France.[2]

On that day her whole being was troubled, and things presented themselves to her eyes, the existence of which she had never even suspected. "My tormentor did not cease to assail me from every

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 410.

[2] This episode ought probably to be assigned to this period of her life, although in her usual manner she records it without giving any date. We cannot believe it to have occurred later than Mother Greyfié's tenure of office. The temptation that it brought upon Margaret Mary was of a kind that proves it to have preceded Louis XIV's conversion. In 1684, when Mother Melin succeeded Mother Greyfié, Mme. de Montespan had fallen out of the King's favour, and Mme. de Maintenon was at the height of her power.

direction," she says; "but he did not tempt me to impurity, for my Divine Master had forbidden him to do this, although once he made me suffer intolerable agony, and this was how it happened. My Superior said to me: 'Go and occupy the King's place before the Blessed Sacrament.' When there I felt myself forcibly attacked by abominable temptations to impurity, so that I seemed to myself to be already in hell. I endured this agony for several successive hours, and it lasted until my Superior released me from this duty by telling me that I should no longer be the King's representative before the Blessed Sacrament."[1]

At this period of her life, Margaret Mary suffered as we have seen from temptations caused by the devil and the hostility of her fellow-creatures. But that was not all, for from time to time God Himself seemed to treat her harshly, as He wished to complete her purifications and to sanctify her by the fire of suffering. She was almost always in bad health; but more than once her illness became the occasion of remarkable favours, and, by curing her miraculously, God appeared to have afflicted her only in order to manifest her holiness more plainly, since her prayers obtained such wonderful answers. One day after she had been in the infirmary for several weeks, Mother Greyfié followed Mother de Saumaise's example, and ordered her to ask Our Lord to cure her at once. The following account is given of the incident: Early in June, 1680, Margaret Mary had to take to her bed, and no

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 411.

improvement had taken place in her condition when on the nineteenth of the month, being the eve of Corpus Christi, Mother Greyfié went to see her, and Margaret Mary asked permission to get up to Mass on the next morning. As she hesitated to give an answer, the Sister urged her request, saying: "My dear Mother, if you agree, Our Lord will agree too, and will give me the necessary strength." The Superior consented, but only on condition that Sister Alacoque should not leave the infirmary fasting. "Then I told the infirmarian," says Mother Greyfié, "to give her some food in the morning, and to let her get up during the Office, so as to go to Holy Mass. In the evening the invalid remarked to the infirmarian that, if I were willing, she would like to go to Mass fasting, so as to be able to receive Holy Communion, and she trusted Our Lord would give her strength enough to do so. The infirmarian yielded to her wish, and, thinking that I should have no objection, she promised her patient to ask my permission. She forgot, however, to do this until the following morning, when, having allowed her to get up fasting and earlier than I had said, she left the infirmary to come and ask my consent to this arrangement. God ordered things in such a way that whilst she was going in one direction, I entered the infirmary by another door. When I saw our poor patient up and dressed, and learnt that she was fasting because she wanted to be able to go to Holy Communion, I administered a sharp rebuke, exaggerating her misbehaviour, which I said was the result of self-will, disobedience, and

want of submission and frankness. Finally, I told her to go to Mass and receive Holy Communion; but as her own will had supplied her with sufficient strength and courage to act as she had done, I, in my turn, intended to give her an order. She was to carry her sheets back to her cell, and her knife and fork to the refectory; she was to go to the Office when the bell rang, and take part in all the community duties for five consecutive months, without once needing to take any remedy, nor setting foot in the infirmary, unless it were to visit the sick there and to wait upon them, if the infirmarians required help. She received my reproof kneeling, her hands clasped, and her face calm and serene. After hearing my orders, she humbly asked my forgiveness and requested me to assign her a penance for her fault, and then at once she began to carry out my commands to the letter. Our Lord desired her to be obedient in everything, and promised her strength to obey me; her health continued to be good until the Presentation of Our Lady, when the five months were over, and then Our Lord, accepting the renewal of her vows, restored to her all, and more than all, her previous ailments. He wished them to be increased that she might lose nothing by not having felt them for five months, and thus the pain in her side, which formerly necessitated her being bled every fortnight or three weeks, now required this treatment every week."[1]

On the day of the Presentation, when the news of this sudden relapse after exactly five months of

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 177 *et seq.*

good, or rather miraculous health, became known in the community, Sister de la Garde, who had been in the noviciate with Margaret Mary, ventured to say to her Superior, "Reverend Mother, you ought to tell Sister Alacoque not to go back to the infirmary for two years, since you succeeded so well in keeping her out of it for five months." The Superior's answer was: "This length of time has been enough to prove that the path which this sister follows is assigned her by God."[1]

Thus everything, even her infirmities and the severity and rebukes of her Superiors, turned to her honour and spiritual advantage; but there were other favours, bestowed upon her in the course of these years, which we may safely assert were more welcome to her than these temporary recoveries of health. Foremost among these favours were two visits paid by Father de la Colombière to Paray, one in 1679, and the second at the end of 1681 and the early part of 1682. On the former occasion he was only passing through Paray, and Margaret Mary saw very little of him; the second time he may be said to have come to Paray to prepare for death. Each time, however, St. Margaret Mary received from him fresh light and encouragement, and through his influence the prejudice that several of her companions still cherished against her faded away. He made no secret of his esteem, or rather veneration, for the servant of God, and more attention than ever was paid to his words and opinions,

[1] Deposition made at the Process of 1715, and quoted by Hamon, *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 283.

since he was now regarded as a confessor for the faith, and not only as a holy religious. The reasons for his leaving England were such that he narrowly missed being a martyr.

He had aroused the hostility of the English Protestants by the success of his apostolic labours, and found himself entangled in an alleged plot against the State. He was arrested at the end of November, 1678, in the Duke of York's palace, and was taken to prison, where he remained a month, contracting there the disease of which he died. There is evidence to show that his execution was discussed, and that he owed his escape to his being a Frenchman, and perhaps also to the intervention of Louis XIV.

We know for certain that towards the end of December he was banished from England and sent back to France, where he landed on the twenty-ninth or thirtieth of the same month. He stayed for some time in Paris, and then went on to Dijon, where he saw Mother de Saumaise. About the middle of February, 1679, he arrived at Paray-le-Monial, but remained there only for a week or ten days, and saw Margaret Mary once in the confessional.

We can form some idea of the benefit that she derived from this short interview from a letter written by Father de la Colombière to Mother de Saumaise about a month afterwards. He says: "As I was passing through Paray I saw Sister Alacoque once only, but I gained much consolation from this visit. I thought her still extremely

humble and submissive, with a great love of the cross and desire to be despised. These are the marks of the spirit that guides her, and they have never deceived anyone."[1]

It is evident that the wise director had again encouraged his penitent and reassured her refined and timid soul, which was always ready to distrust herself and to fear the snares of the devil. Besides Margaret Mary herself, there was another who needed reassurance on the subject of God's extraordinary dealings with her. "Her fears," said Mother Greyfié, "had communicated themselves to me, but I was comforted by a conversation that I had with Father de la Colombière, to whom I spoke on the subject."[2]

This conversation may have taken place on the very day when he saw St. Margaret Mary. "He told me," adds the Superior, "that he did not hesitate to believe that this dear Sister's experiences were indeed graces from God. 'But what would it matter,' he said, 'if they were actually diabolical illusions, provided they produced in her the same results as God's grace? There is no appearance of this being the case,' he added, 'because then the devil, in wishing to deceive her, would deceive himself, for humility, simplicity, exact obedience and mortification are not the fruits of the spirit of darkness.'"[3]

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 161. [2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 159.

[3] Quoted in the *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie, publiée par le Monastère de Paray*, p. 161 *et seq.*, from an old copy preserved in the Archives of the Visitation Convent at Paray. *Cf. Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 159 *et seq.*

After this short visit to Paray, Father de la Colombière did not return until, as we have said, he came to prepare for death. In August, 1681, his superiors sent him thither again in hopes that the mild and equable climate during the autumn might alleviate his sufferings, for he was then extremely ill.

In spite of his bad health, which occasionally prevented him from doing anything at all, he saw St. Margaret Mary several times. In a letter to Mother de Saumaise, written on January 20, 1682, she says: "He is still very ill; I have seen him twice, but it is a great exertion to him to speak; perhaps God allows this in order to have more pleasure and leisure in speaking to his heart."[1]

There can be no doubt that during these last interviews on earth the two apostles of the Sacred Heart discussed the devotion to which they had resolved to dedicate, or rather sacrifice, themselves. For more than six years Margaret Mary had been the victim of the Sacred Heart, and was gradually dying in its service and for its glory. Father de la Colombière was to die suddenly at Paray, to show more plainly for what end, and with what intention, he offered himself as a holocaust to his Divine Master.

His visit to Paray had not the desired effect upon his health, and a change of air being thought necessary, arrangements were made for taking him to Vienne in Dauphiné, where he had been born. The greatest secrecy was observed with regard to the

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 62.

proposed journey, and it was not until January 27, the day immediately preceding the date fixed for his departure, that Mdlle. Catherine Mayneaud de Bisefranc, one of his penitents, and a friend of St. Margaret Mary, was informed of the plan in confidence, and on condition that she told no one else. She begged to be allowed to make an exception in favour of Sister Alacoque, and, having obtained permission, she went at once to the Visitation Convent, where Margaret Mary received the news very calmly, showing no surprise, and asked her friend to tell Father de la Colombière from her that he ought not to go, if he could stay without disobeying his superiors.

Surprised at receiving such a message, for which no definite reason was given, the priest hastily wrote a few words on a sheet of paper, asking Margaret Mary to write down her motive for sending it. Mdlle. de Bisefranc undertook to deliver this note, and, as the Jesuit house was only three minutes' walk from the Visitation Convent, she soon returned with an answer. Margaret Mary's reply consisted simply of the words: "He told me that He desires the sacrifice of your life here."

The sick man read the message, and at once asked that the journey should be given up, and that he might be allowed to die at Paray. A fortnight later he breathed his last, at seven o'clock in the evening on February 15, 1682.

The next day, about five o'clock in the morning, Mdlle. de Bisefranc carried the sad news to the Convent, and Margaret Mary said very mournfully:

"Pray, and ask others everywhere to pray for him." But about ten o'clock, only a few hours later, Mdlle. de Bisefranc received a note from her containing the words; "Cease to grieve, invoke him, and fear nothing; he is more powerful to help you than ever."[1]

We cannot read these lines without recalling the privilege received by St. Margaret Mary from God, which soon became known to all around her, of communicating freely with the souls in Purgatory and of penetrating in spirit to that place of expiation, so that she seemed aware of everything there. People used often to come to ask her what had become of departed friends and relatives, and the souls themselves, that she called her "suffering friends," often were with her, especially when she prayed, asking her urgently to use on their behalf the influence that she possessed over the Sacred Heart. God Himself had given them to her as clients, or rather He had given His beloved servant to these poor souls, in order that her good works and merits might plead for them with Him. In April, 1683, she wrote to Mother de Saumaise saying: "Our Lord told me that He had given me to them for this year, so that I might do them all the good I could."[2]

Accordingly, no one at the Visitation Convent was inclined for a moment to question her statement that on the day after his death Father de la Colombière was already in possession of the reward due to his labours and virtues. In spite of

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 183, etc. [2] *Ibid.*, II, p. 77.

the prudence with which Mother Greyfié always treated everything in Margaret Mary's conduct or language that seemed to have an extraordinary or supernatural character, she seems on this occasion to have felt no difficulty in accepting her assertion. In fact, she wrote as follows in the memorandum from which we have already quoted more than once: "When Father de la Colombière died, our dear Sister lost the greatest friend that she had in the world; but she was by no means disturbed or anxious, because she loved her friends for God's glory and for their advancement in His Divine love, and not for her own sake. As I noticed that she did not ask for prayers and extraordinary penances for him as she did for others, I questioned her as to the reason. She replied with a calm and happy expression: 'My dear Mother, he does not need them; he is in a position to pray for us, as he occupies a high place in heaven, through the goodness and mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Only in order to make up for some carelessness that had clung to him in the practice of the love of God, his soul was not permitted to see God, from the time of its departure from his body until he was laid in the tomb.'"[1]

All these facts, in which the supernatural element reveals itself at every turn, were the topic of conversation amongst the community during the days following Father de la Colombière's death, and made a deep impression upon St. Margaret

[1] *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie, publiée par le Monastère de Paray*, p. 193. *Cf. Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 85.

Mary's companions. Her opponents could not conceal their confusion, and were now unwilling to say anything decidedly against her. As to the Sisters who for some time past had not feared to take her part, or who at least had forborne to express any opinion about her, being moved both by prudence and charity, they felt more and more encouraged openly to espouse her cause.

Margaret Mary on her side began henceforth to overcome her timidity, and occasionally she ventured to try to communicate to others the sacred fire that was consuming her soul; yet she was still far from thinking it her duty to divulge the secret of the revelations of the Sacred Heart. The moment had not yet come for her to make it known to the world; but the love of God for men, the adorable Heart which is the symbol of this love in His sacred humanity, and the worship to which this Heart is entitled, were, to use her own words, "all that she breathed," and we may suppose that sometimes, almost involuntarily, some mention of them passed her lips.

One day, as it often happened, she was ill in bed in the infirmary. She had as her companion there her friend, Sister de Lyonne, who, not being very ill, was able to walk about. On this particular day there was a sermon in the convent chapel which Sister de Lyonne was very anxious to hear. She hesitated for a moment, but then compassion for Margaret Mary prevailed, and she determined to remain with her and give up going to the chapel. The kind-hearted Sister lost nothing by her charit-

able action, for, as if inspired by God to compensate her friend for the sacrifice that she had just made on her account, Margaret Mary began to speak of the love of the Sacred Heart for men, and of the love that we ought to give in return. Her eloquence was so irresistible that Sister de Lyonne was delighted, and, as an old chronicle says, "she remained filled with unction, more so than if she had heard ten sermons."[1]

There is reason to believe that she was thus happily inspired on more than one occasion, especially when she was speaking to the children in the school, who formed a very enthusiastic audience. After an interval in which she had acted as assistant infirmarian, under the vigilant and somewhat harsh discipline of Sister Marest, she had been sent back to teach the young "sisters of the little habit," who had never ceased to love and respect her as their saint, and in their presence she showed less reserve and spoke more freely.

It seems, therefore, that, at the period which we have now reached, Margaret Mary was entering upon a fresh stage of life; that she felt the end approaching of the trials, struggles, and hostility which she had encountered, and we may suppose that she could read the future and foresee the hour of triumph that awaited her.

[1] Quoted by Hamon, *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 300.

CHAPTER VII

TRIUMPH

IN May, 1684, the second period of three years during which Mother Greyfié had been Superior expired, and the Sisters of Paray had to elect her successor. They did not on this occasion choose a Superior from another convent, but elected one of themselves, Sister Mary Christina Melin, who for thirty-four years had edified them all by her strict observance of the rule, her fervour, and her great virtues. The dominating features of her character were kindness, prudence and piety, which made people say that she was sweetness, wisdom and devotion personified.[1]

She was sixty-five when she assumed the government of the house where she had been professed, and had held the offices of Assistant to the Superior and Mistress of Novices. She was Superior for six years, and during that time only one reproach was ever made against her—viz., that she was too good and kind. This fact did not, however, weaken the respect paid to her merits nor the confidence felt in her ability; for in 1703, when she had reached the age of eighty-four, she was appointed Superior for a second time in spite of all her resistance.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 479.

According to the chronicles of the convent: "Years had not diminished her powers of judgment, but had only increased her virtues." She lived nearly long enough to reach the end of her second term of office, being ninety years of age at her death on December 17, 1708.

Mother Melin had known Sister Alacoque from the time of her entering the convent, and had almost from the beginning regarded her with a tender, motherly affection that increased as years went by. Whenever Margaret Mary was in trouble, she had been one of the nuns who defended her most energetically.

If Margaret Mary had been guided only by human motives, she would have welcomed with joy a change of Superior that seemed to promise her ample compensation for her previous trials; but she was guided in all things by a supernatural spirit, and felt a desire, an irresistible craving, for suffering and humiliation which she was never able to satisfy. Hence she was alarmed at what would have delighted another less perfect and less detached than herself. We know from her own writings what she thought about the matter. Two months after Mother Melin's election, when Margaret Mary had had time to feel how gentle and light the new Superior's rule was in comparison with that of her predecessor, she wrote as follows to the latter:

"Dear Mother, how hard it is to live without loving our Sovereign Good, and without suffering for this love. . . . I seemed to be safe under your guidance, because it always made me go against my

natural inclinations, and this pleases the spirit by which I believe myself to be led, and which would fain see me always plunged into every kind of humiliation, suffering, and contradiction; otherwise it gives me no rest. Nature rebels against all this, but the spirit governing mine cannot endure me to have any pleasure save that of having none."[1]

In Margaret Mary's opinion, therefore, Mother Melin treated her with too much indulgence in sparing her reproofs and remonstrances, but she laid upon her a heavy cross in calling her to hold honourable positions in the convent. Hitherto Margaret Mary had held only offices of minor importance in the infirmary and in the school, but the new Superior thought that the light should not be kept too long under a bushel. Accordingly, being bound immediately after her election to choose an Assistant, she proposed Sister Alacoque to the chapter, and the proposal was accepted at once. In order to make up for the little honours attached to her position, the new Assistant was eager to find humiliations and hard work everywhere. For instance, she used to offer to help the lay Sisters in their most tiring and disagreeable occupations. Her contemporaries tell us that one day, when she was busier than usual, the good kitchen Sisters begged her to give them some assistance. She was then sweeping the choir—a task assigned to her in virtue of her office—and without waiting to take up the dust, she went to the kitchen. The bell rang for the Office before

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 85.

she was able to return, so she felt much mortification; but this was her usual reward. God allowed her often to forget things so as to increase her humility and mortification, the virtues dearest to her heart.[1]

Sister Alacoque had been Assistant for about six months when the Mistress of Novices was taken seriously ill, and a substitute had to be appointed. It is probable that Mother Melin had already decided what to do, but if she had had a moment's hesitation with regard to the appointment, her action would have been determined by the novices themselves. One of these young Sisters, Péronne Rosalie de Farges, when called upon to make a deposition during the process of 1715, spoke of the veneration with which all in the noviciate had long regarded Margaret Mary, and of the exalted idea that she and her companions had of the venerable Sister, which induced them to ask the Superior to give her to them as their Mistress, in order that by her example they might learn to make progress in the state which they had chosen.[2]

They were not disappointed in their hopes. Three excellent Mistresses had succeeded one another in the noviciate, all three being "living rules," as the chronicles of the convent record; but yet, according to the same chronicles, Margaret Mary's novices agreed in saying that, although they had learnt all the convent customs from the three other Mistresses, and although they saw them practise these customs in the community, Sister Alacoque used to explain

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 218 *et seq.* [2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 230, note.

things with such heavenly unction that it seemed to flow from the very Heart of Jesus, and made virtue delightfully easy.[1]

So great were the new Mistress's success in dealing with the novices and her influence upon them, that some who had left the noviciate asked permission to attend her instructions, and under her guidance to acquire more perfectly the spirit of their holy state.

The first to do this was Sister Claude-Marguerite Billet, whose uncle was physician to the community. She had been professed nine years, but no sooner had St. Margaret Mary entered upon her new duties than Sister Billet "asked as a favour to go back to the noviciate under this holy directress," and proved herself a most docile and loving pupil. She was one of the first to practise and propagate the devotion so dear to her beloved Mistress. In the registers of the convent the notice of her death is followed by the brief but eloquent remark: "She was a faithful lover of the Sacred Heart."[2]

Another young religious, who had been professed six years, did not exactly re-enter the noviciate under Sister Alacoque, but obtained permission to attend the instructions given to the novices. This was Sister Anne Alexis Guinet de Mareschalle. She used to give singing-lessons to the novices, and so had an opportunity of hearing their instructions and sharing their pious practices, even (as we read in the "circular" regarding her) "in those of supererogation, owing their origin to their good

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 27 *et seq.* [2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 484.

Mistress's pious invention." She, too, was ardent in propagating devotion to the Sacred Heart.[1]

St. Margaret Mary was gradually putting aside her reserve with regard to this devotion, and lost no opportunity of urging her novices to practise it. She was greatly assisted by an occurrence that took place in the first half of the year 1685, which might be called accidental, although it is difficult not to consider it providential. In the previous year several volumes of Father de la Colombière's works had been published by Anisson at Lyons, and among them one containing the notes of his "Spiritual Retreat." This book was being read aloud in the refectory at Paray at the time of which we are speaking. No one had any doubts as to its being suitable, for all knew the author's reputation for learning and sanctity. It is probable, too, that the Assistant had not been so careful as usual to obey the Constitutions of the Order, which require her to satisfy herself each Sunday that the passages to be read aloud during the week contain nothing in the least degree unsuitable. The greater part of the book had already been read, all being interested and edified, when suddenly the reader came to a passage in which the pious author first thanks God for having made use of him to spread amongst heretics faith in the Real Presence, and adds: "I have seen that God wished me to serve Him by procuring the fulfilment of His desires regarding the devotion that He suggested to someone, with

[1] *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie, publiée par le Monastère de Paray*, p. 219. *Cf. Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 500.

whom He communicates in confidence, and He has deigned to make use of my weakness for this end. I have already made it known to many people in England, and I have written about it in France, and begged one of my friends to spread this devotion in the place where he is. It will do a great deal of good there, and the number of chosen souls in that community makes me believe that the practice of it in that holy house will be most pleasing to God. Would that I could be everywhere, so as to make known, O my God, what Thou askest of Thy servants and friends."

The silence was always profound in the refectory filled with nuns devoted to their rule, but when these words were read it seemed to grow deeper, and the hearts of all were filled with emotion, which became more and more intense as the reader proceeded, no doubt with trembling voice, to the next paragraph: "God having spoken to the person, who, we have reason to believe, is one after His own Heart, because He has given her great graces, she explained them to me, and I caused her to commit what she had told me to writing. I wish to give an account of this myself in the journal of my retreats, because, in carrying out His designs, God deigns to make use of my feeble efforts."

Then follows a full account of the great revelation of June, 1675, taken word for word from Margaret Mary's own story of it: "This person spoke thus: 'Being before the Blessed Sacrament one day during its octave, I received from my God

excessive tokens of His love.'" All that Our Lord said is quoted, from the words "Behold this Heart which hath so much loved men" to "I ask of thee that the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi be set apart for a special feast in honour of My Heart."

It was impossible not to see what was so obvious. The person "with whom Our Lord communicated in confidence" was Sister Alacoque, and the wonderful revelation made by Him to His servant was the secret that for ten years she had hidden in her heart. It explained everything in her conduct and general behaviour that had caused many of her companions to laugh at her and find fault with her. At that moment many of them must have felt true contrition, and wished to make reparation to her. Father de la Colombière, a man respected and loved by all, seemed to live again in his book[1] in order to bear witness in her favour, and to guarantee before them all the genuine character of her work and the divine origin of her mission.

The rule requires the religious in the refectory to keep their eyes downcast whilst at table. Sister Péronne Rosalie de Farges, the young novice who was reading aloud, could not, however, control her curiosity, and glanced at the novice Mistress, who appeared completely overwhelmed and crushed by what she had just heard.[2]

What took place during the recreation that

[1] *Vie, publiée par le Monastère de Paray*, p. 232.

[2] Quoted by Hamon, *Vie de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 362, note 2.

followed? The only piece of information that we have on this subject is contained in Sister de Farges' deposition, made in 1715. She seems on this occasion to have played the part of an *enfant terrible*, for, as soon as she joined the community after dinner, she ran to St. Margaret Mary (as she herself said), and told her to her face: "Dear Sister, you heard your own story to-day, and Father de la Colombière could not have described you better." The answer that she gave was that she had good reason to love her humiliation.[1]

No doubt at the moment this was the feeling most prominent in her soul; but may we not suppose that after this memorable incident in the refectory she was conscious of another sensation? Forgetful as she always was of herself, and thinking only of the honour of Him to whom she had dedicated her life, she must have rejoiced at no longer being bound to keep a secret that was beginning to weigh heavily upon her, and also at being set free, by Father de la Colombière's unexpected revelations, to enter upon her mission to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Certain events that soon afterwards took place seem to justify this supposition. The feast of Corpus Christi was approaching, and the Friday after the Octave was destined to be the day dedicated to the feast of the Sacred Heart. Although the Church had not yet recognized this feast, it was already dear to St. Margaret Mary, who kept it secretly after a fashion of her own every year.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 231, note.

In 1685 she wished her novices to share in the celebration, and so she proposed to them to make what was called in convents of the Visitation Order a "challenge." This consisted of certain pious exercises, by means of which the nuns, and especially the novices, tried to rival one another in the practice of some particular virtue. In this way they contended in a sort of mystical conflict, to see who should surpass the others in fervour and fidelity.

The details of the challenge or *défi*, which St. Margaret Mary designed to prepare the novices for the feast of the Sacred Heart in 1685, have been preserved, and run as follows:

"In the first place, on awakening, you will enter into the Sacred Heart, and consecrate to it your body, soul, heart, and all your being, that you may employ them henceforth solely in loving and honouring it. When you go to make your meditation, you will unite yours with that which our Lord makes for you in the Blessed Sacrament.

"When you say your Office, you will take part in the praise that He offers to God His Father in this Divine Sacrament.

"When you hear Holy Mass, you will unite with the intentions of His loving Heart, and beg Him to apply the merits of it to you, according to His gracious designs for your welfare.

"As you go to the refectory, you will return to this adorable Heart, if, unhappily, you have left it. You will take your spiritual refreshment in it, and

you will ask Our Lord to plant His grace in your souls and His pure love in your hearts."[1]

St. Margaret Mary continues in the same strain, telling her dear children what they are to do hour by hour, and almost minute by minute, throughout the day, especially in circumstances calling for some self-denial and courage to resist the attacks of the devil, or to endure some opposition on the part of their neighbours. She shows them how they can then more particularly manifest their love of the Sacred Heart, and their desire to imitate it.

We do not know how the novices responded to her appeal, nor how this first feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated. All the information we have is that she herself fastened up on the altar in the novitiate a representation of the Sacred Heart, drawn in accordance with the words of Our Lord Himself in the second great revelation. It was drawn with pen and ink, either by Margaret Mary or by one of her pupils, and is now treasured as a precious relic by the Visitation nuns at Turin.

This first evidence of devotion on the part of the Paray novices to the Sacred Heart must have been kept very secret, for it attracted no attention, as far as we can ascertain, even in the convent. Margaret Mary must have impressed upon the young Sisters under her care the need of prudence and discretion, although at the same time she did her best to arouse their piety and fervour.

Soon, however, she became less reserved. July 20

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 495 *et seq.*

was approaching, and the novices were preparing to keep their Mistress's feast, which that year (1685) fell on a Friday. This coincidence and her ardent desire to lose no opportunity of planting and encouraging the growth of devotion to the Sacred Heart in the novitiate led Blessed Margaret Mary to ask the young novices to pay to this Divine Heart whatever honours they had intended for her. This would be, she said, the best way of testifying their love.

The novices, of course, were ready to do anything to please their beloved Mistress, and set to work at once. They decided to give her a surprise early in the morning of St. Margaret's Day, when they would all be with her. About a quarter to seven, Prime being over, the novices and Blessed Margaret Mary, who until that hour had been with the rest of the community, always went to their own room. But how were preparations to be made without her knowledge, unless part of the night could be devoted to them? The novices had recourse to kind Mother Melin, who raised no objections, and they got up at midnight and arranged a little altar in the novitiate, decorating it as well as they could with roses, and placing on it the representation of the Sacred Heart, which they had venerated in the preceding month on the day after the Octave of Corpus Christi. When they had finished, wishing to get forward with their other work, and to have the morning free, instead of going to bed, they went into the refectory to prepare it for the next day. Perhaps their joy and excite-

ment made them rather too noisy, for in the early morning some of the older nuns went to the Superior and complained that their rest had been disturbed, and that the novices had broken the rule of silence. Mother Melin reproved the culprits, but, as they themselves said, she was satisfied almost before they had time to apologize.[1]

This unpleasant little episode was over when St. Margaret Mary, surrounded by the novices, entered the room which they had transformed into an oratory of the Sacred Heart. On seeing the improvised altar, she expressed her gratitude and admiration for the skill with which they had prepared for her so pleasant a surprise, and those who heard her thanks were even more delighted than she was herself. Then, kneeling down, she consecrated herself to the Sacred Heart in words that seemed to breathe seraphic fervour, as the eye-witnesses of the scene tell us. She suggested that the novices should follow her example, and each in turn make an act of consecration at the foot of the little altar. They obeyed with so much goodwill and piety that she thanked them once more, saying: "You could not, dear Sisters, have given me greater pleasure than you have done in venerating this Sacred Heart and consecrating yourselves to it. How happy you are to have been employed by Our Lord in establishing this devotion! and what a joy it is to me that my Divine Master's adorable Heart should be known, loved, and honoured! Yes, dear Sisters, this is the greatest joy that I can have in

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 236.

life. Let us love Him, without reservation, without exception, and, if we possess the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we shall have everything, for He desires to be everything to the heart that loves Him, though this can only be by suffering for Him."[1]

These last words were really prophetic, as subsequent events soon showed.

Transported with joy at the sight of her novices fervour, and in her ardent love for the Sacred Heart wishing to bring everybody to her Divine Master's feet, St. Margaret Mary, towards the close of the day, thought of inviting some of the older nuns to come and see the little altar in the noviciate and to pray there. One novice, Sister Frances Rosalie Verchère, who had all day been particularly zealous in seconding her Mistress's wishes, was asked to carry the invitations. The first nun whom she met was Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures, an intimate friend of Margaret Mary's, but excessively rigid in her observance of the rule. She took the invitation in bad part, and said sternly: "Go and tell your mistress that true devotion consists in obeying our rules and constitutions, and that is what she ought to teach you and you ought to practise." Others were apparently still less guarded in their language, protesting, in the name of the constitutions, against any innovation contrary to the customs of the Order, and declaring that it was not Sister Alacoque's business, and still less that of little novices, to introduce new-fangled devotions, and, as it were, rules in the very rules themselves. Not daring to repeat all

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 238, etc.

that she had heard, poor Sister Frances Rosalie simply told her Mistress that the nuns could not come; but St. Margaret Mary understood, and answered quietly but decidedly: "Say rather, they will not come. They are opposed to this devotion to-day, but the time will come when they will be most zealous for it."

This second prediction was also to be fulfilled, but not until the first had been fully accomplished.

The day that had been so happy was saddened by this refusal, so contrary to the dearest desires of the apostle of the Sacred Heart; but this was not all—the Superior, instigated no doubt by the Sisters who had tried in the morning to make her find fault with the novices, now blamed their Mistress, forbade her doing anything in future to promote the new devotion outside the noviciate, and ordered her to cease going to Holy Communion on the first Friday of each month—this was the greatest punishment of all to a soul hungering for the Bread of Life. Mother Melin was soon obliged to withdraw this last prohibition, in consequence of an occurrence resembling that which, under similar circumstances, had led Mother Greyfié, too, to change her mind. This was not all, however. The little disturbance aroused in the community by the incidents of July 20 soon quieted down, and left no permanent results. But a real storm, far more violent and of longer duration, broke out soon after, and gave St. Margaret Mary the opportunity of paying in full for the favours already received, and for the final victory that she was soon to win.

There was at that time in the noviciate a young postulant, Mademoiselle de Vichy-Champrond, who belonged to one of the most aristocratic and powerful families in the province. She had been a pupil in the school, but wished to remain in the convent and take the veil there, only because her father had intended her to embrace the religious life, when he was making arrangements for his children. St. Margaret Mary soon saw that she had no call from God, and went to Mother Melin to tell her that she, personally, was sure that it was their duty to send Mademoiselle de Champrond back to her family. The Superior's annoyance and anxiety were very great, and still greater were the fears and perplexity of her Council, to whom she had to refer the matter. They had good reason to dread the anger and vengeance of the postulant's family, for no sooner was notice sent that she was to be removed, than abuse and threats were hurled against the whole community, and especially against Sister Alacoque, who was held responsible for all the trouble. She was denounced as a hypocrite and a visionary, given to practising outrageous and fanciful devotions. For a time there was some idea of her being imprisoned and brought before Cardinal de Bouillon, who was very closely connected with the Vichy-Champrond family, and who, being then an exile in his abbey at Cluny, used often to visit them in their château, situated on the borders of the districts of Macon and Lyons.

What must have caused St. Margaret Mary most acute pain was the fact that this storm in the

outside world had its counterpart in the convent. Many of the Sisters made spiteful suggestions about her, and treated her as uncharitably as on the memorable evening of November 8, 1677.

Amidst all this turmoil she herself never lost her supernatural composure and smiling resignation; but her novices, not yet possessing such sanctity, were less patient, and were indignant at seeing her overwhelmed with insults and reproaches. With the generosity and loyalty of youth they wished to protest on her behalf; but she ordered them to be silent, and, showing how much she had learnt from the Sacred Heart, she reproached them with not knowing how to profit by the graces that the cross always brings with it, and with trying to shake it off and get rid of it, instead of embracing it with love.[1]

Such goodness and patience were not left unrewarded. The episode just described took place about May, 1686, and the next month witnessed the triumph of the Sacred Heart, which St. Margaret Mary had foretold in the preceding year, when she said that the Sisters who were then most opposed to the new devotion would soon be most eager to practise and propagate it.

On Thursday, June 20, the Octave day of Corpus Christi, Sister des Escures went to Margaret Mary and asked for the loan of a small picture of the Sacred Heart, that Mother Greyfié, then Superior of the Visitation Convent at Semur, had had drawn in accordance with Sister Alacoque's description,

1 *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 263.

and had sent her in January as a New Year's gift. Sister des Escures intended to invite all the community to venerate this picture. St. Margaret Mary was much surprised and disturbed, but she concealed her emotion, and without hesitation did as she was asked. On the morrow, however, it must have been difficult for her to refrain from tears, when, on entering the choir, she saw a little altar placed against the grille, and on it her picture from Semur, surrounded with flowers. Above it was a little notice, written and signed by Sister des Escures, inviting "all the Lord's spouses to come and venerate His Sacred Heart." Some few, the eldest and those most rigidly attached to established customs, felt some hesitation and annoyance at the sight of the altar, with its picture and the notice above it; but, finally, they followed the example of the majority, not wishing to stand aloof from the general enthusiasm, and so they joined their Sisters in prayer and adoration, and soon all the community united in extolling our Saviour's Sacred Heart.[1]

Thus on June 21, 1686, less than a year after the little disturbance of July 20, and at the suggestion of the very Sister who had then provoked it, the feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated for the first time at Paray-le-Monial. St. Margaret Mary had triumphed, her prediction had been fulfilled, and a few days later she gave vent to the supernatural joy that she felt, and wrote to Mother Greyfié, saying: "I shall die happy, since

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 269 *et seq.*

my Saviour's Sacred Heart is beginning to be known."[1]

The four remaining years of Margaret Mary's life were full of consolation and graces, bestowed in almost unbroken succession. Her Divine Master continued to visit her frequently, and it was then that she received those famous promises, known as the Promises of the Sacred Heart, which were partially contained—as the reader has no doubt observed—in the great revelations, and which, rightly understood, can do much to restore faith in the souls of men, and to promote their sanctification.[2]

It was then, too, that Our Lord entrusted to her His famous message to the King, in which is revealed a new feature of the devotion that was to be taught and accepted everywhere. We cannot ascertain the precise date of this revelation, which from its importance must be classed with the great visions of 1673, 1674, and 1675. We only know that it took place in 1688, perhaps in June, or a little later in the year. Our Lord then reminded Margaret Mary of His desire that devotion to His

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 122. In memory of this great day, the Sisters at Paray decided to build a chapel in honour of the Sacred Heart within their enclosure. It is still standing, and was solemnly blessed on September 7, 1688, in Margaret Mary's presence. The devotion that she loved so much soon spread from Paray to other houses of the Order, especially to Dijon, Moulins, and Semur, thanks to Mother de Saumaise and Mother Greyfié, the ex-Superiors of Paray. Before she died she had the happiness of foreseeing how widely the devotion would spread so as eventually to become universal.

[2] *Cf.* J. V. Bainvel, *La Dévotion au Sacré-Cœur de Jésus*, p. 66 *et seq.*

Sacred Heart should be universal, and He renewed His promises to those who complied with His request, and then said that this was not all—He had still greater designs, which could be carried into execution only by His omnipotence, that is able to accomplish all that it desires. He added: "Make known to the eldest son of My Sacred Heart" (as St. Margaret Mary explained, this expression referred to the King) "that as his temporal birth was obtained by devotion to the merits of My holy Childhood, so will he obtain his birth of grace and eternal glory by his consecration of himself to My adorable Heart, which wishes to triumph over his, and through him over those of the great ones of the earth. It desires to reign in his palace, to be painted on his standards and engraved on his arms, to render them victorious over all his enemies, by bringing low the proud and haughty heads, so as to make him conquer all the enemies of Holy Church." [1]

Was this message ever delivered to Louis XIV? We cannot tell; but, if delivered, it certainly awakened no perceptible echo at Versailles, any more than it did in St. Margaret Mary's immediate surroundings. The account just given of the revelation occurs in a letter written by her to Mother de Saumaise, her former Superior, who was always her friend, and who was most zealous in propagating devotion to the Sacred Heart. Margaret Mary goes on to say: "You will feel inclined to laugh, dear Mother, at my simplicity in telling

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 233 *et seq.*

you all this." We do not know whether Mother de Saumaise was really tempted to smile on reading these confidences, but she did not answer them at once, and the "contemporaries," whose account abounds in details of every kind, especially with regard to everything concerning the Sacred Heart, do not allude at all to this remarkable event.

It was not until much later that its full import was understood, and people began to see that devotion to the Sacred Heart was not to be merely a private and personal matter, aiming at the sanctification of souls, but, as St. Margaret Mary declared, being inspired by our Saviour's teaching, it was to be a "public, official, and national devotion," bringing happiness and prosperity upon the nations that accept and practise it. We may say, like a famous prince of the Church, Cardinal Pie, that this devotion is a gift of God bestowed particularly upon France, and constituting part of her national treasure, given her as a sign of God's protection, to be a defence against the enemies of religion and patriotism.[1]

No one need say that this message is out of date at the present time, because it is addressed to Louis XIV, who has long been dead. As Mgr. Bougaud points out, according to the ideas of that period, France and her King were identical. The King represented in his person all the French nation.[2]

[1] Cardinal Pie: *Œuvres Complètes*, VI, p. 608, and VII, p. 549.

[2] Bougaud: *Histoire de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie*, p. 373.

Two centuries ago "the eldest son of the Sacred Heart" failed to do what that Heart required of him, and now it remains for "the eldest daughter of the Church" to accomplish the task. Many Frenchmen, and those the best of their race, seem ready to do so. In proof of this statement we may recall the action of the Catholic deputies, who, on June 29, 1873, went to Paray-le-Monial to pray at St. Margaret Mary's shrine, and expressed their most earnest desire to consecrate France, their beloved country, with all its provinces and all its works of faith and charity, to the Sacred Heart. The Basilica on Montmartre, each stone of which is a token of faith and piety offered to Christ and His Divine Heart in the name of France epentant and believing, is further evidence of the devotion of that country to the Sacred Heart. There are unmistakable signs of that triumph foretold by Margaret Mary in a letter already quoted: "This loving Heart shall reign, in spite of Satan and the fools whom he deceives."[1]

During the last years of her life, Margaret Mary seems to have devoted herself with more zeal than ever to her personal sanctification, in order to hasten the coming of God's kingdom. It was at this time that she made the heroic vow of perfection, which increased her likeness to St. Teresa, whom she already resembled in many respects. As her earliest biographer very justly points out, this vow was in her case the result, rather than the cause,

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, II, p. 232.

of her great sanctity,[1] for she had already kept it with the utmost fidelity for several years before asking and receiving from her director permission to make it. This director, Father Rolin, a Jesuit, deserves special mention in every biography of Margaret Mary, for it was he who in 1685 ordered her to write her most valuable memoir or autobiography, without which we should have only a very incomplete knowledge of her. It is to him, too, that we owe the statement that she kept her baptismal innocence unspotted until death.

One of her contemporaries writes as follows: 'After her director, Father Rolin, had heard the, general confession of her whole life, made during a retreat five or six years before she died, he deliberated for a long time whether he should not order her to write it out and keep it, thinking that some day, after her death, it would be possible to recognize the extreme purity of this faithful spouse of Christ, and to see to what heights of innocence, refinement and sanctity a soul could rise that God had never ceased to guide and favour with His choicest graces."[2]

One of the clauses in this heroic vow is the following: "I will allow my Superior perfect liberty to dispose of me as she thinks fit, accepting with humility and indifference whatever occupations obedience may assign to me, in spite of my intense dislike of holding any office."[3]

At the end of 1686 she ceased to be novice

[1] Croiset: *Abrégé de la Vie de la Sœur Marguerite-Marie*, p. 45.
[2] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 322. [3] *Ibid.*, I, p. 278.

Mistress, and was for a short time assistant infirmarian; then, after a few months, she became Mistress of the boarding-school. In both capacities she had much to suffer. In the infirmary her clumsiness and her unavoidable absences brought down upon her many reproofs, often rather sharp, from the chief infirmarian, Sister Marest, who, being particularly capable herself, required everything to be in perfect order.[1] In the boarding-school, too, she felt herself deficient in every quality requisite in training young girls, and the life of constant activity was incompatible with her craving for recollection and prayer.

She could at least console herself with the thought that these two offices were by no means the most honourable in the house, and so could not expose her to any temptation to pride, but it must have caused her great distress of mind to be nominated Assistant for the second time in May, 1687. Notwithstanding her dislike of the office, she continued to hold it until her death. Not long before she died, she was threatened with a far greater trial. Mother Melin was about to retire from the office of Superior, having held it for six years, and, as Margaret Mary's contemporaries tell us, she was so generally esteemed in the convent that there was some thought of choosing her to be Superior. She was warned of this possibility by her Divine Master in the following way: On Holy Thursday, March 23, 1690, He presented her with a cross that she accepted without knowing what it signified. After

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 286.

having made the sacrifice and submitted to it, she learnt some time afterwards that her name was to be one of those proposed for the next election. This afflicted her so much that she complained to Our Lord, saying: "Is it possible, O my God, that Thou shouldst allow a creature like myself to be placed at the head of a community? I implore Thee to take away this cross from me; to any other I will submit." Our Lord granted her request, and Mother Catherine Antoinette de Lévy-Chateaumorand was elected, to Margaret Mary's great delight.

Her joy was not, however, unmixed with disappointment. She had hoped that under a new Superior she would be released from the office of Assistant, but this was not to be. Mother de Chateaumorand and all the nuns agreed in thinking that there was no one else in the community so capable of helping those who needed advice or encouragement, or so highly endowed "with lights and graces to assuage suffering," and therefore she had to continue to bear her cross.[1]

It was not for long, however, and she felt that her end was near. She was often heard saying: "I shall not live, for I have nothing to suffer." On October 8 she was taken ill, but neither the Sisters nor the doctor believed her to be in imminent danger. Even on the morning of her death, Dr. Billet, an old friend of the community, declared that she had no alarming symptoms, and even after she had breathed her last he continued to say that

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, p. 319, etc.

he had observed nothing in her illness to suggest so speedy an end; he could not doubt that she had died simply of love of God.[1]

On October 17, 1690, she expressed a wish to receive the last sacraments without delay. There was some hesitation about granting her request, and fresh remedies were proposed for her relief, but she said: "I need nothing beyond God alone, and to lose myself in the Heart of Jesus Christ."

The priest came at length, and had hardly anointed her for the fourth time, when she gave up her soul to God, after having uttered the Name of Jesus in one last outpouring of love and longing. Like St. Jane de Chantal, she had at two different times written this sacred Name in letters of blood upon her heart, this Name that during the forty-three years of her life on earth she had never ceased to honour by her virtues and good works; and now, in union with the seraphim, "her divine colleagues," as she called them, she was to sing its praises in heaven for all eternity.

[1] *Vie et Œuvres*, I, p. 331.

5587